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Magus of the Library

Mitsu Izumi

Based on *Kafna of the Wind* by Sophie Schwimm
Translated by Taito Hamada

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Mitsu Izumi

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"Pledge"
Scene from the performance art piece *The Legend of the Great Magus*

"Even the most intricate creation is wrought
from crude material."

—Proverb among Aftzaak papermills

...and now the continent finds itself fast approaching a new chapter in its turbulent history.

Based on Kafna of the Wind

Ninety-five years have passed in uneasy truce since the Great War of the Races...

Of the Seven whose names line the Palena Protocol in solemn vow, only one remains in the public eye: the head of Aftzaak's great Central Library.

by Sophie Shwimm

The heroes of old have begun to retire one by one, passing rule of their regions to new leaders with new ideals.

The passing of the torch must not be far, as preparations for an election are already underway to name the one...

The Library, too, has been searching for a new figurehead to one day speak on its behalf.

But a rumor is circulating around the continent, its source unknown yet the implication clear.

...who will someday become...

...the next Magus of the Library.

SHF
ズ…

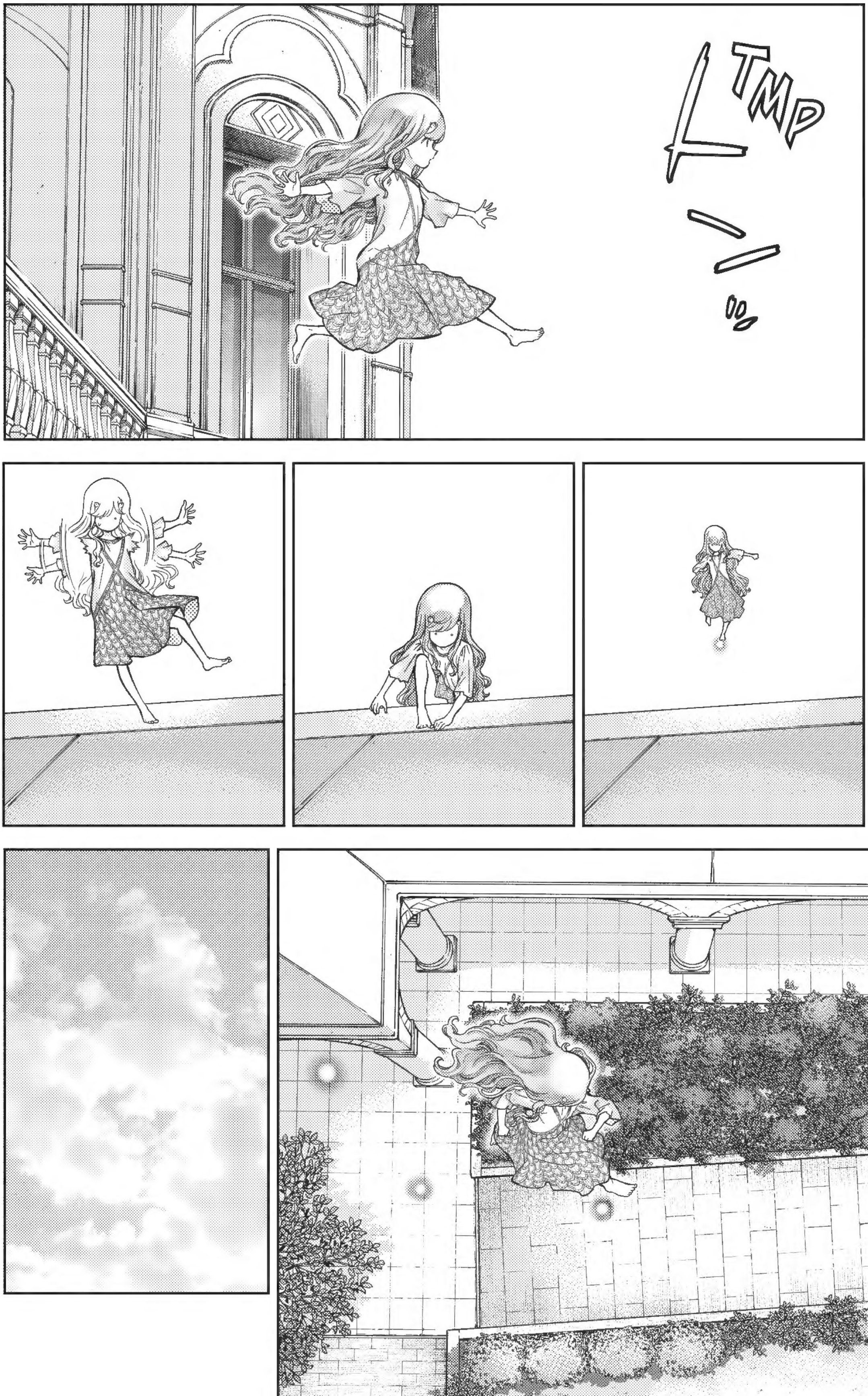
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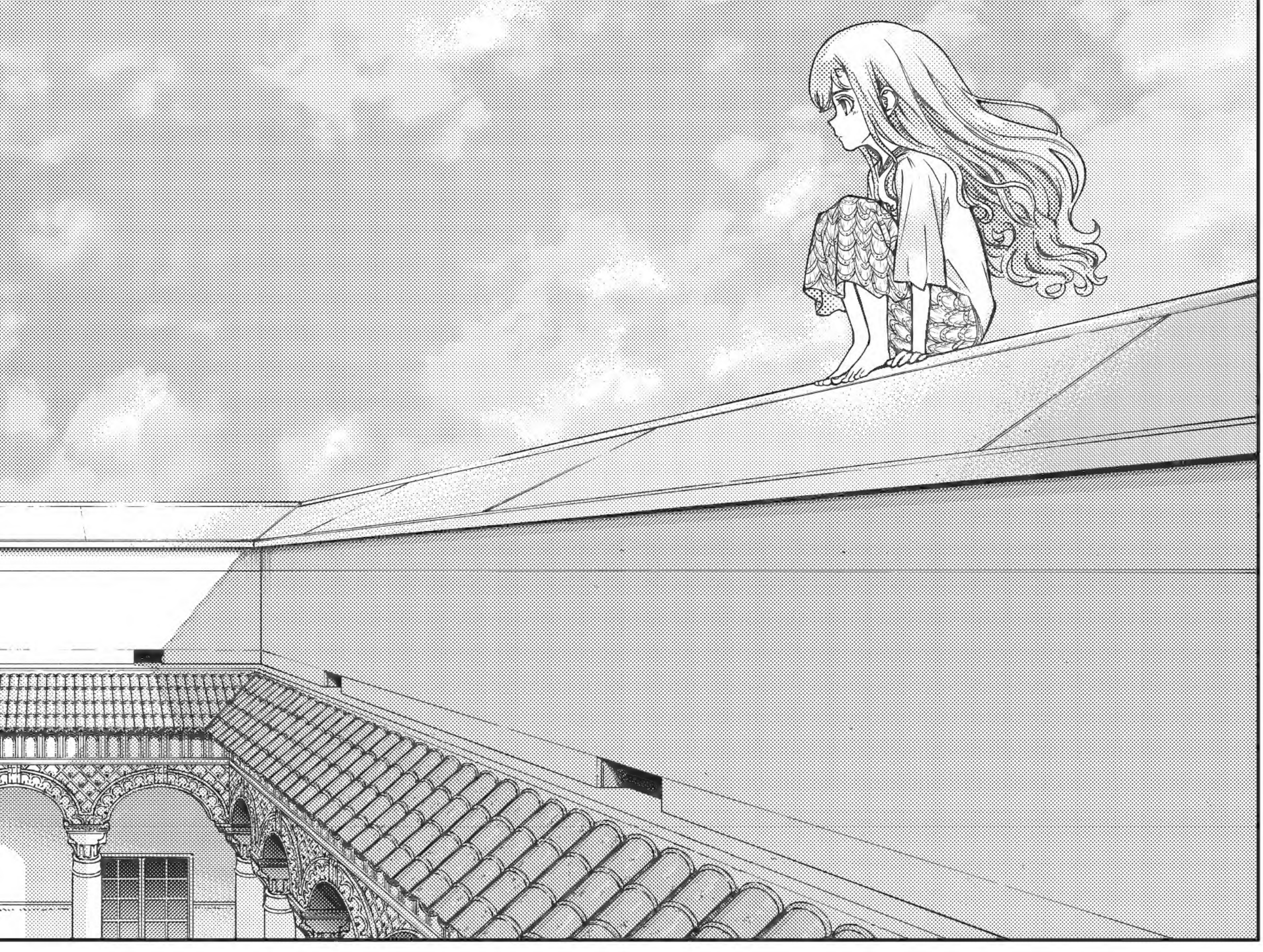
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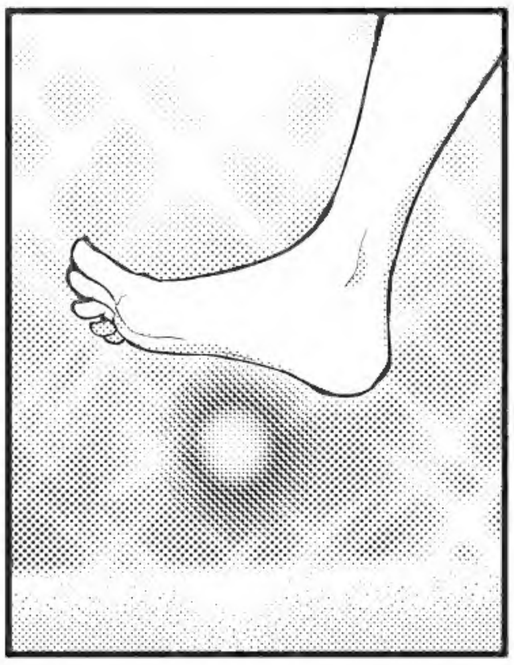
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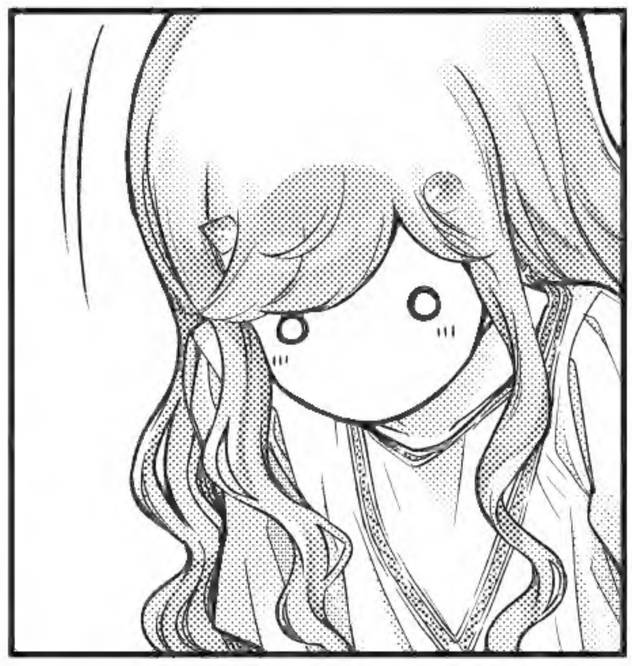
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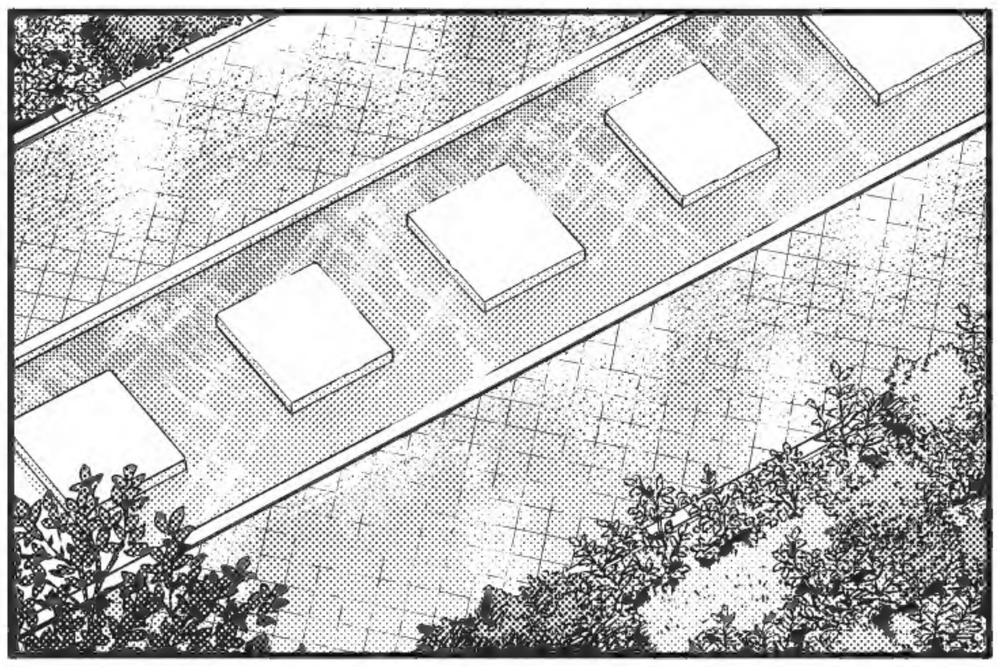
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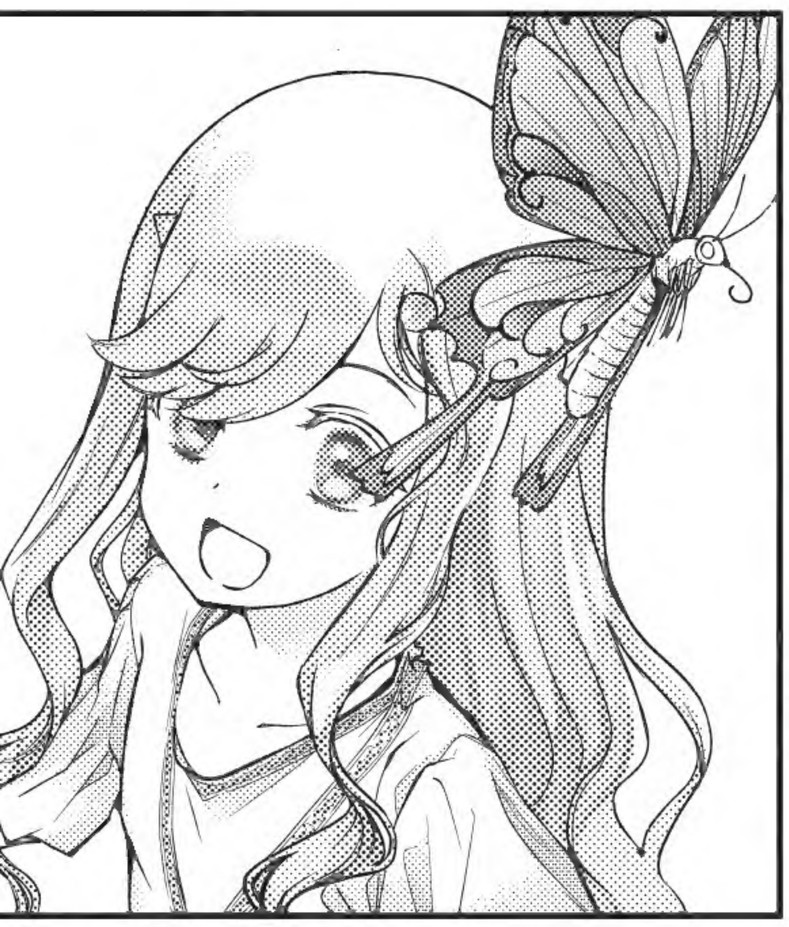

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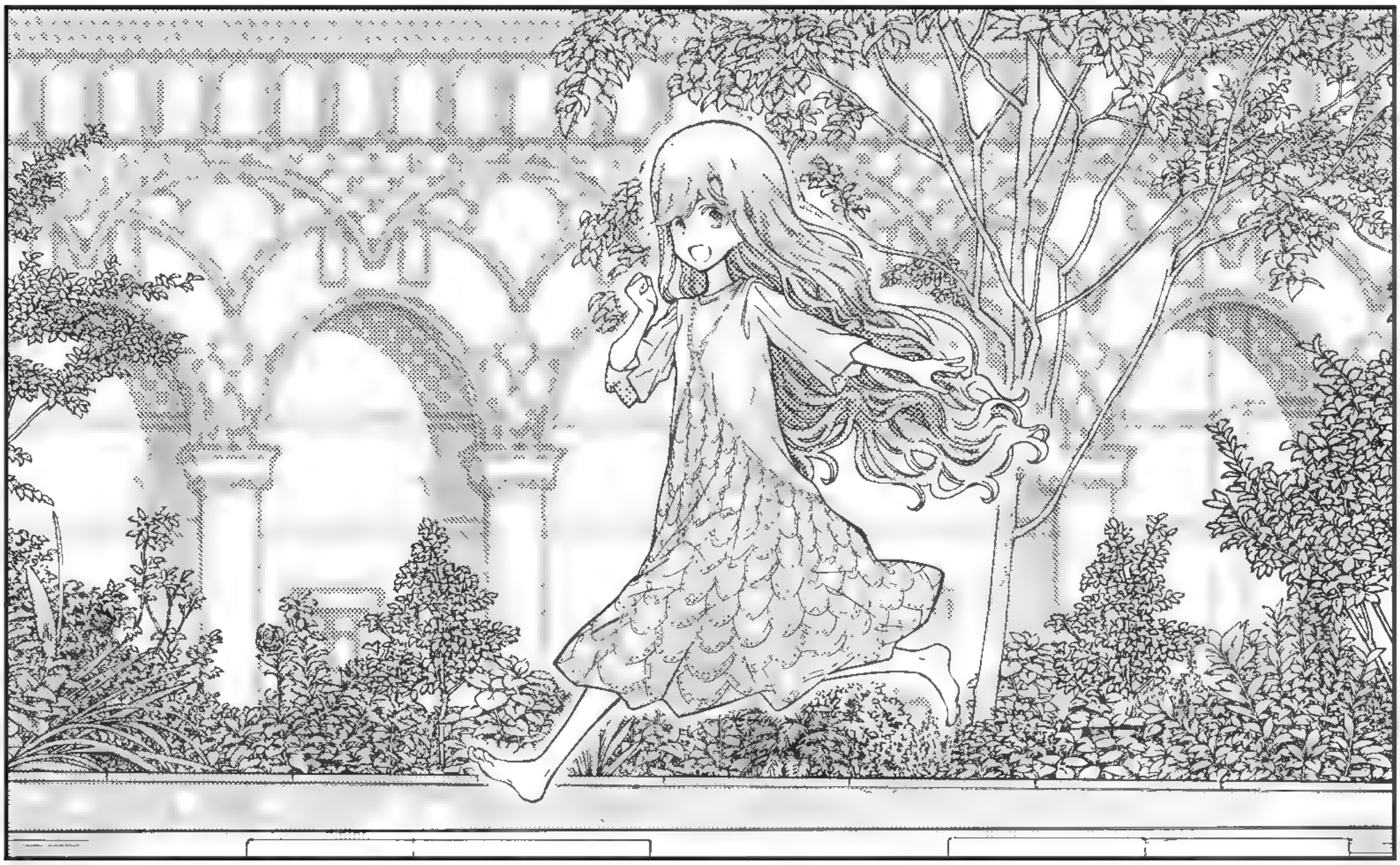




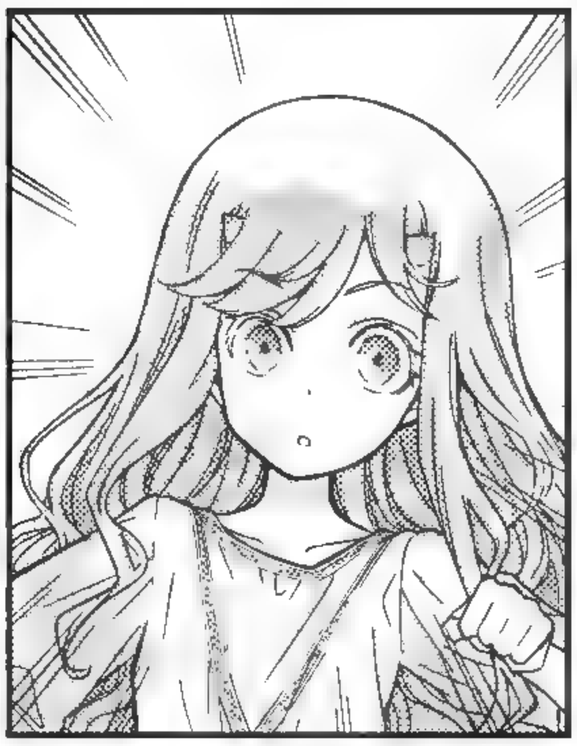


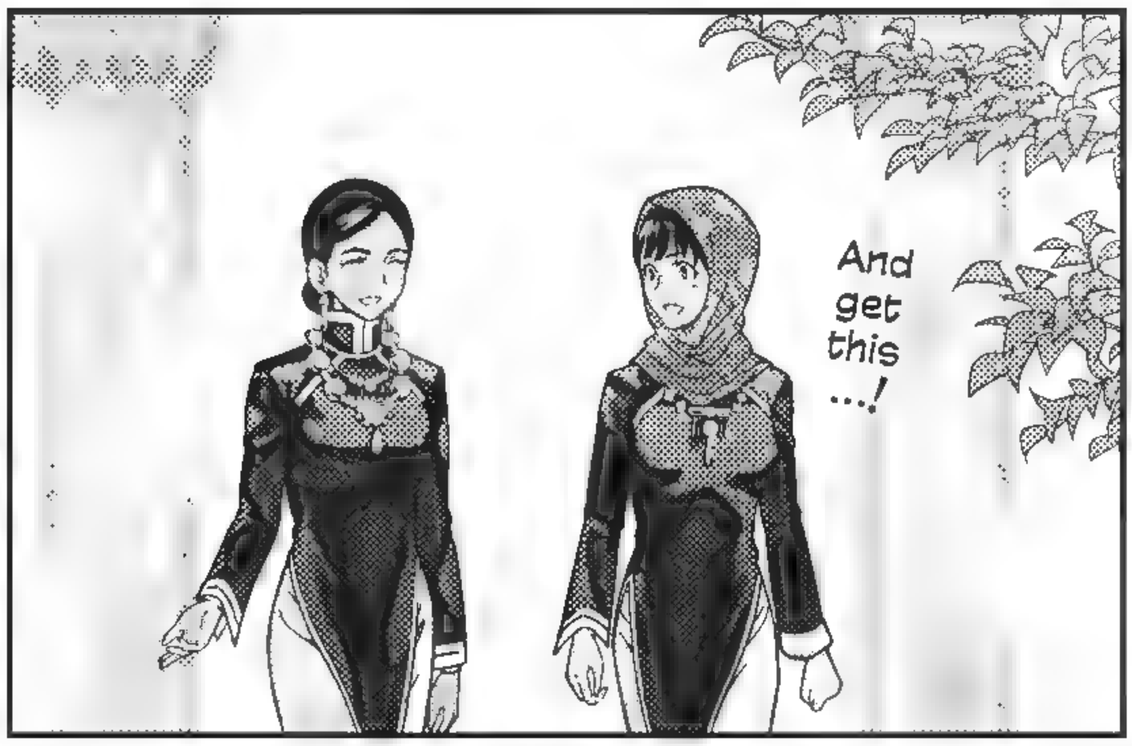


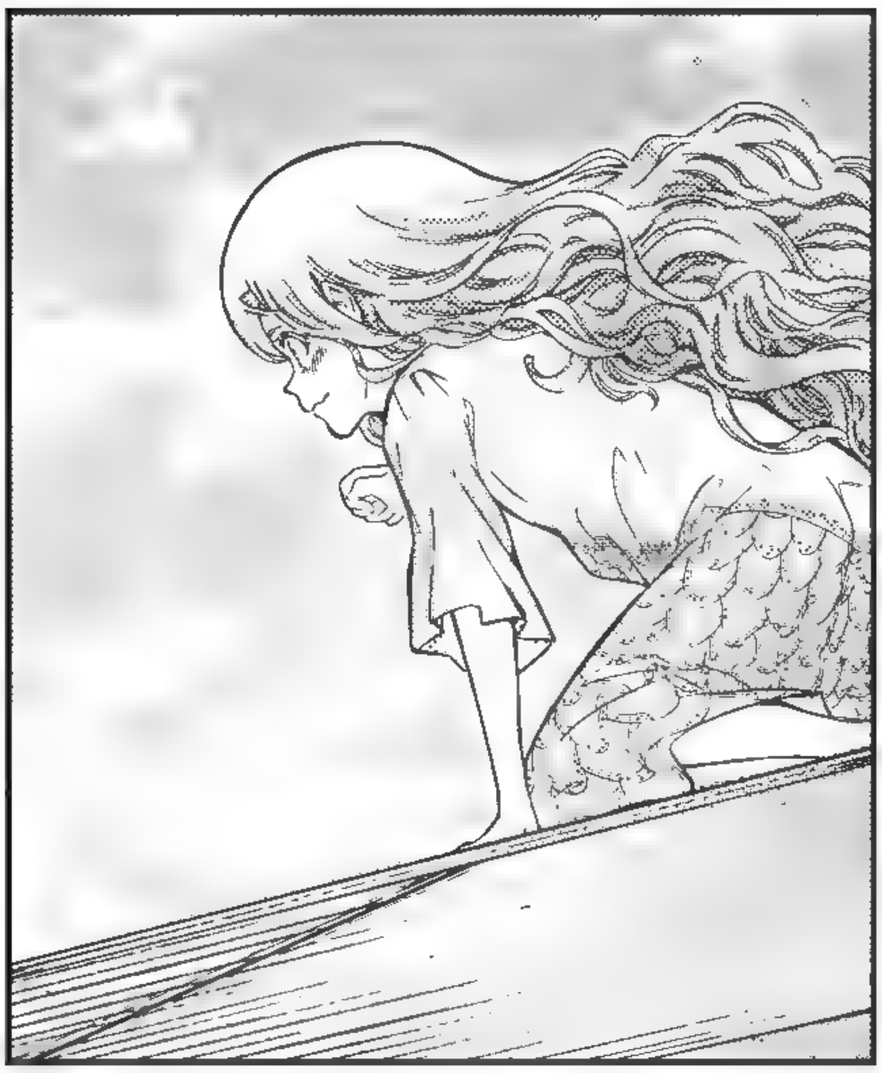




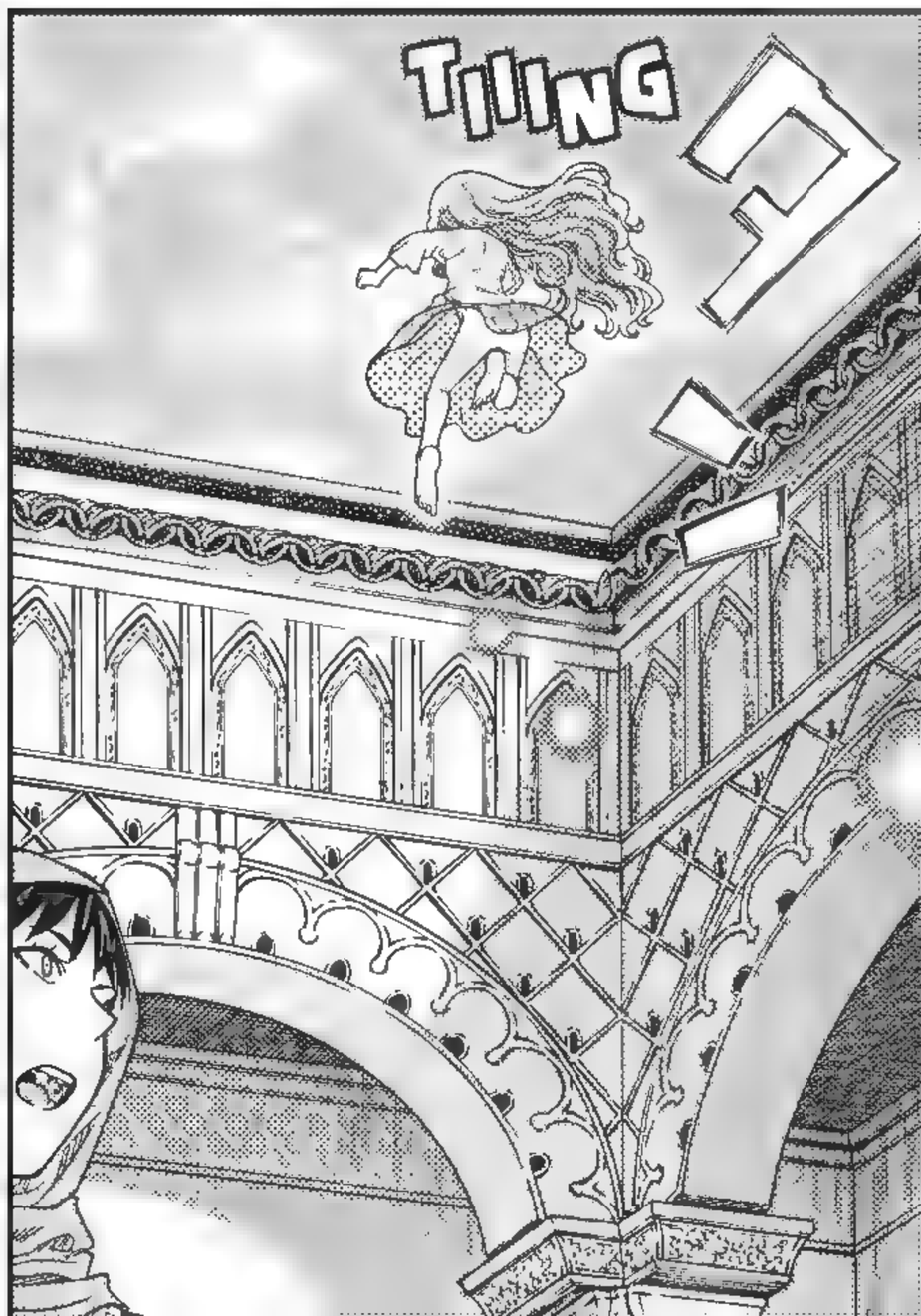





And get this ...!

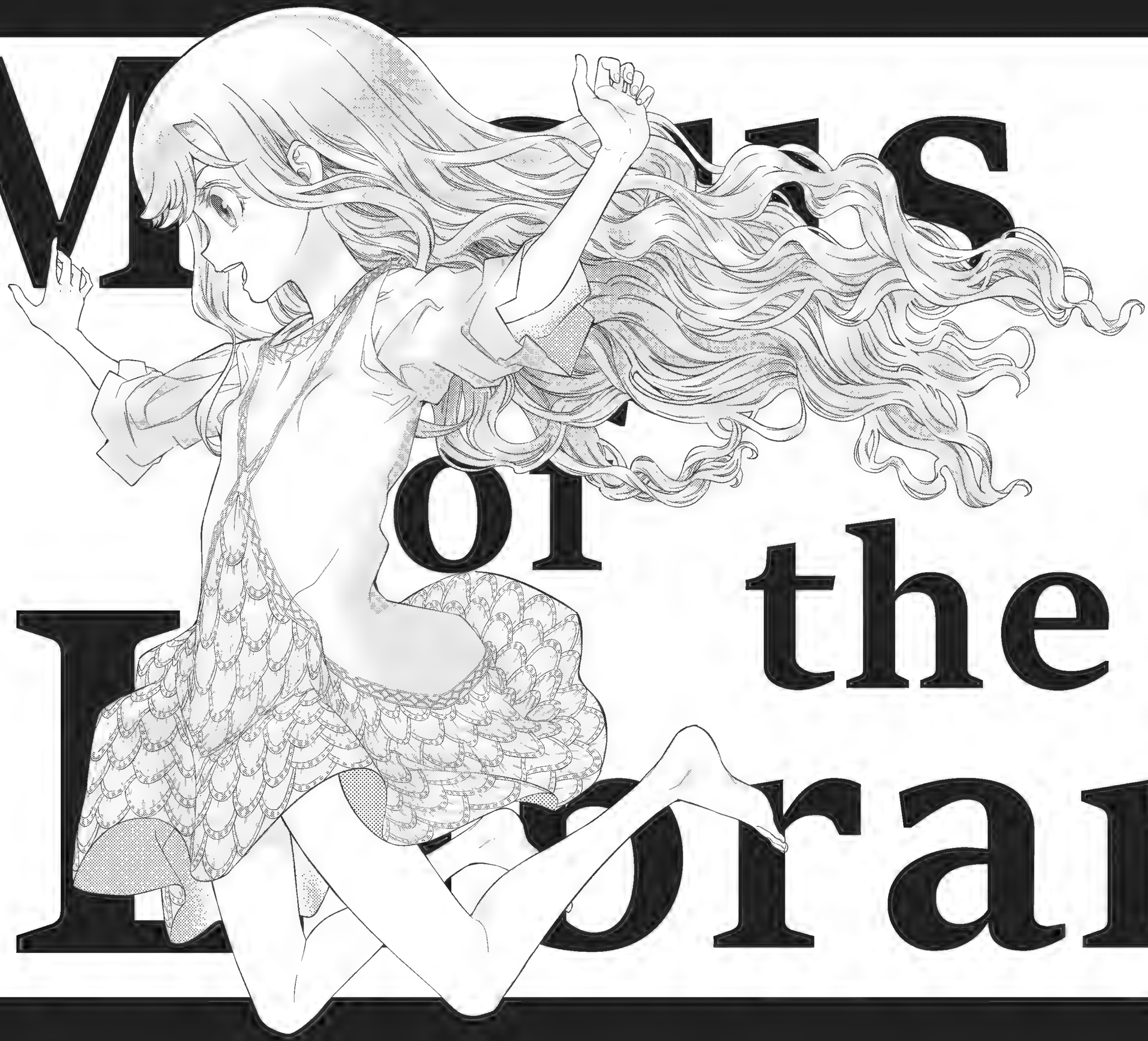



A-AND THAT GIRL ...!
THAT LIGHT ...!
WAS THAT A CIT-LAPOL ?!

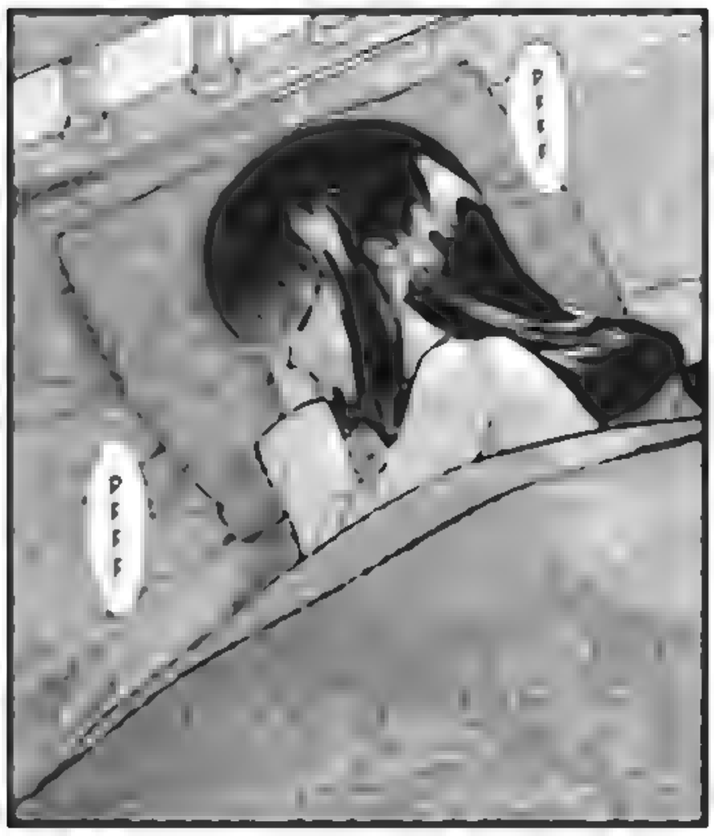

THUNG



Miss Goldilocks and the 6 Library

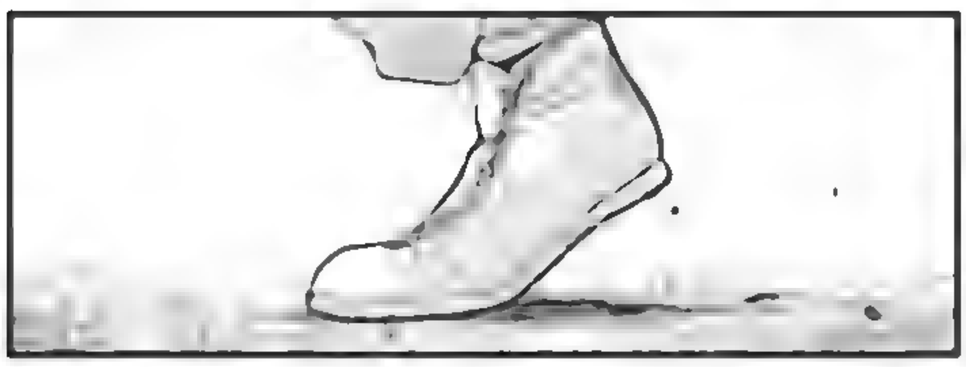


25 Full Focus















MRR-MMM... Just five more minutes ...

EVERY GOOD DAY STARTS WITH EARLY MORNING PRAYERS!

UP AND AT 'EM!

P-TMP

WHEW...

KA-CHAK

THANK YOU! WE'LL BE MORE CAREFUL NEXT TIME!

DO YOU EVEN HEAR YOUR-SELF?!

Why do you have to be such a stickler for rules?!

BOY, WE GOT OFF EASY! THEY WEREN'T ANGRY AT ALL!

THAT'S WHAT YOU GOT OUT OF THIS?!

I thought for sure they'd demand a written apology!

FOR ONE THING, TEI'S CLOTHES WERE ALL TORN UP.

OH, I THINK THEY'D HAVE FIGURED IT OUT.

GAH! WE COULD'VE AVOIDED ALL OF THIS HASSLE IF WE DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING! NOBODY SAW US!

I prefer "strategic"!

I DIDN'T REALIZE YOU WERE SO CUNNING.

AHH. VERY CLEVER.

THE TRICK TO DELIVERING AN APOLOGY IS TO DO IT FIRST THING IN THE MORNING.

THEY MIGHT STILL GET ANGRY, BUT YOU CAN GET IT OVER WITH BEFORE THEY'VE HAD TIME TO DECIDE EXACTLY HOW TO CHEW YOU OUT!

SLUMP

EVEN AMONG THE KAFNA, YOUR PRESENCE ISN'T EXACTLY COMMON KNOWLEDGE.

AND *PLEASE* PUT ON SOME PROPER ATTIRE.

PERHAPS YOU COULD REFRAIN FROM FLITTING ACROSS THE ROOFTOPS? IT FRIGHTENS PEOPLE.

CENTRAL LIBRARY
PROTECTIONS OFFICE
ROI SAN DUTH

UNTIL NOW, THE GIRL'S BEEN HESITANT EVEN TO STEP OUTSIDE DURING THE DAY. AN EARLY MORNING EXCURSION SEEMS A VERY PROMISING DEVELOPMENT.

I'M TERRIBLY HAPPY FOR HER.

WHAT'S WITH THE SMIRK?

HEH!

Hey, Popo-po? Why is it that ...

WELL, THEN. SHALL WE BE OFF TO BREAKFAST?

DASH

HUH?!

PEEK

FREEZE

SQUEEEEEZE

HUM DEE DUM...

LOOK! TEI'S HERE!

!

GOOD-

SHF SHF SHF

Whuh ?!

GOOD MORN-ING!!

ZWIP

NUH-UH! NOT SO FAST!

I'M NOT LETTING YOU GET AWAY THAT EASY!

I BET IF WE STUDY TOGETHER, WE'LL BE ABLE TO COMMU-NICATE IN NO TIME!

I'VE BEEN THINK-ING...

IF YOU'D LIKE, MAYBE WE COULD BE LANGUAGE BUDDIES?

GREAT! IT'S A DEAL!

NOD

LET ME GUESS... YOU ASSUME SHE'S ABOUT, WHAT, SEVEN YEARS OLD?

HUH? UM... YES?

DON'T WORRY! IT'S SAFE FOR ME TO GET CLOSE TO TEI. I WON'T GET SICK!

OH! AND UM...

HUH ?!

UM... YES! THAT'S ME!

AH. YOU MUST BE THEO FUMIS.

I-I MEAN, GOOD MORNING, SIR!

...SHE'S ACTUALLY *TWELVE.*

GIVEN HER STATURE, I'M NOT SURPRISED. BUT THE TRUTH IS...

I AM *SO* SORRY, MISS TEI! PLEASE FORGIVE ME!

SHWIP

A WAY TO CONNECT WITH MADHA? THAT'S EASY!

TALK ABOUT BOYS!

UNDER-NEATH THE TOUGH ACT, SHE'S TOTALLY A HOPELESS ROMANTIC!

I'LL BE HAPPY TO GIVE YOU THE LOWDOWN ON WHICH GUYS SHE'S INTO.

OH?

YOU'LL DO FINE! PLAY THE WISE TEACHER FIGURE. WRAP AN ARM AROUND HER SHOULDERS AND OFFER SAGE ADVICE.

AREN'T I A BIT *OLD* TO BE GIGGLING OVER CRUSHES?

ONE CAN NEVER FULLY SURRENDER TO INTUITION. EVENTUALLY, IT IS BOUND TO TRIP US UP.

THE TRUE POWER OF EXPERIENCE ONLY MANIFESTS WHEN PAIRED WITH ACCURATE AND TIMELY INFORMATION.

SURE THING. ALTHOUGH... I'M KINDA SURPRISED TO SEE YOU GATHERING INTEL BEHIND THE SCENES.

I ASSUMED AT YOUR LEVEL, YOU COULD NAVIGATE PRETTY MUCH ANY ISSUE ON EXPERIENCE ALONE.

WELL, I'M GRATEFUL FOR THE ASSISTANCE. AND FOR YOUR WILLING-NESS...

...TO CHAT FIRST THING IN THE MORN-ING ON OUR DAY OFF. IT'S HEARTEN-ING TO KNOW I'VE GOT A GRADUATE OF THE GIRLS' PREP SCHOOL ON STAFF.

WE SHAN'T REIN THEM IN SIMPLY BY RESTING ON OUR LAURELS.

AMASSING THAT INFORMATION IS AN ADMITTEDLY EXHAUSTING ENDEAVOR. YET IT IS CRUCIAL WORK.

EVERY TRAINEE HERE SPENT HER SCHOOLDAYS AN UNRIVALED, UNCHALLENGED PRODIGY.

...THAT HOLDS TRUE MORE THAN EVER.

AND THIS YEAR...

KA-CHAK

Ha ra ra!

Yes! See you later!

SHE'S...

I-IS EVERYTHING ALL RIGHT? ARE YOU FEELING ILL?

P-TMP

...

UM... MISS MEDINA?

OWWW!

FWAP

LOOKS LIKE YOUR MASTER'S A LITTLE UNDER THE WEATHER TODAY.

Morning, Mr. Featherface!

DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW TERRIFIED I WAS?! I WOKE UP AND YOU WERE *GONE*!

ばた FLAIL ばた FLAIL ばた FLAIL ばた FLAIL

NOOO! YOU *GOTTA* COME, ALV! IT WON'T BE THE SAME WITHOUT YOU!

ALL RIGHT, HERE'S THE PLAN! GRUB, AND THEN THE THREE OF US HIT THE TOWN!

COUNT ME IN!

THE *TWO* OF YOU. I'M NOT GOING ANY-WHERE.

GLOMP

I WAS STARTING TO THINK ALL THESE HAPPY DAYS TOGETHER WERE JUST A FIGMENT OF MY IMAGINATION!

DID YOU STOP TO CONSIDER THE FACT THAT HIS *LUGGAGE* IS STILL HERE?


See ya! Have fun!


AH HA HA HA HA...


...FATHER IN HEAVEN, CREATOR OF ALL THINGS...
O LORD VIRACO-CHA...

...I THANK THEE FOR ALL THOU HAST BESTOWED.

MY HEALTHY CONSTITU-TION...

MY DEEP AND UN-WAVERING FAITH...

A CLEAR MIND WITH WHICH TO KNOW THE WORLD AROUND ME...

AND MOST OF ALL, MY BIRTH INTO THE GREAT AND NOBLE HAHAL'K LINEAGE...
FOR ALL THESE THINGS, I AM GRATEFUL.

I MOST CERTAINLY HAVE NEVER...

...DESPISED MY LOT IN LIFE OR CURSED THE WORLD TO WHICH I WAS BORN.

MY FATHER IS A STRICT MAN...

WHAT ARE THESE TEST SCORES ?!

YOU BRING SHAME TO THIS FAMILY'S GOOD NAME!

...YET HE RARELY PAID ME ANY MIND, NOT EVEN TO SCOLD OR COUNSEL.

I SUPPOSE IT WAS BECAUSE HE KNEW HOW DEEP MY FAITH RAN AND HOW DILIGENT I WAS IN MY STUDIES.

...OR THAT I WAS THE YOUNGEST DAUGHTER AND WOULD PLAY NO PART IN THE FAMILY BUSINESS...

...OR THAT HIS ONLY EXPECTATION OF ME WAS TO SOMEDAY MARRY WHICHEVER SON OF WHATEVER BUSINESS ASSOCIATE WOULD HAVE ME.

IT MOST CERTAINLY WAS NOT...

...BECAUSE MY MOTHER WAS A COMMONER AND MY BIRTH UNEXPECTED...

...BECAUSE SHE WAS PLEASED TO HAVE WORMED HER WAY AMONG A NOBLEMAN'S WIVES AND NOW WANTED NOTHING MORE THAN TO PUSH HER DAUGHTER'S CARE ONTO THE SERVANTS SO SHE COULD LIVE A LIFE OF INDULGENCE ALL ON HER OWN.

IT MOST CERTAINLY COULD NOT HAVE BEEN...

I SUPPOSE IT MUST'VE BEEN BECAUSE SHE WAS ILL AND NEEDED REST.

MY MOTHER LIVED APART FROM US FOR ALL MY LIFE.

IT MOST CERTAINLY WAS NOT BECAUSE THEY REFUSED TO ACCEPT ME AS A TRUE DAUGHTER OF THEIR HOUSE.

MY SIBLINGS WERE VERY COLD TOWARD ME.

I SUPPOSE THEY ENVIED THE WAY I EXCELLED IN ALL MY LESSONS.

...AND MOST CERTAINLY NOT BECAUSE THEY TITTERED IN PRIVATE ABOUT THIS CLEVER GAME THEY'D DEVISED TO MOCK ME.

I SUPPOSE THEY DID SO BECAUSE OF THE NATURAL GRACE THOU HAST BESTOWED UPON ME...

THE SERVING LADIES ALWAYS TREATED ME WITH AN OVERABUN-DANCE OF RESPECT.

DO YOU NEED TO ASK? WHAT RESPECTABLE HOUSE WOULD EVER AGREE TO TAKE HER IN?

ARCH

TAVERN

SURELY SHE'S OLD ENOUGH TO MARRY BY NOW. WHY IS SHE STILL HERE?

HERE WE GO AGAIN. THE LITTLE LADY IS THROWING ANOTHER FIT.

I WAS COMPELLED TO DEMONSTRATE IN SPECTACULAR FASHION THE GRATITUDE I HARBOR FOR THE LIFE THOU HAST GRANTED.

HIT...

HIT...

...I WAS PRONE TO GREAT SURGES OF JOY.

AT TIMES...

SUCH EPISODES WERE MOST CERTAINLY NOT...

...BECAUSE I LOATHED MY FATHER...

...MY MOTHER, AND MY SIBLINGS...

...AND HATED THE HOUSE TO WHICH I'D BEEN BORN WITH ALL MY HEART.

P-TMP

KCHK

KCHK

IT MIGHT HAVE SEEMED THAT WAY, BUT IT MOST CERTAINLY WAS NOT.

OH! BUT...

DON'T GET THE WRONG IDEA. I AM *NOT* YOUR PERSONAL SERVANT!

...JUST IN CASE YOU HADN'T EATEN.

I BROUGHT SOME FOOD FOR YOU...

I'M GOING TO HEAD OUT FOR THE DAY.

MISS MEDINA?

WHAT A FUN DAY.

THOUGH I GOTTA ADMIT, I'M STILL NOT USED TO THE CITY'S CROWDS.

I'M STILL NOT MANAGING TO FINISH OUR TESTS IN TIME.

AND...

IS IT RIGHT FOR ME TO BE OUT ENJOYING MY DAYS OFF LIKE THE OTHER TRAINEES?

UM... WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU, MISS TEPEL?

DO YOU HAVE A MOMENT?

JUST THE PERSON I WAS HOPING TO SEE!

THEO!

HUH?

I HOPE THEY DIDN'T BOTHER YOU.

IT'S ABOUT THE OTHER DAY. CAUICHA'S COMMENTS IN CLASS.

OHH... RIGHT.

"IF YOU'RE NOT UP FOR THIS, MAYBE YOU COULD DO US ALL A FAVOR AND QUIT?"

!
YOU'VE BEEN FRIENDS WITH MISS CAUICHA SINCE YOU WERE LITTLE?
SHE'S ALWAYS BEEN LIKE THAT. SO DON'T LET IT GET TO YOU!
TO HER, EVERY-THING'S A ONE OR A ZERO. NO MIDDLE GROUND.
WHOA, WHOA!
DO *NOT* PUT THE BLAME ON YOURSELF. CAUICHA IS... HOW DO I PUT THIS? KIND OF *EXTREME*.
IF ANYTHING, I DESERVED IT. I'M THE ONE WHO CAN'T MANAGE TO KEEP UP.
...IS BECAUSE SHE'S THE DAUGHTER OF THE GUY WHO BUILT THE LIBRARY IN MY NEIGH-BORHOOD.
THE ONLY REASON WE CROSSED PATHS...
IN CAUICHA'S MIND, I'M BASICALLY JUST ONE MORE FACE IN THE CROWD.
?
FRIENDS ...?
WELL... MORE LIKE ACQUAIN-TANCES. AT BEST.
SHE'S A HOZANYK! YOU KNOW, THE FAM-ILY THAT OWNS THIS PLACE?!
SHH!
WHOA. WHO'S MISS SNOBBY OVER THERE?
OOH! I SHOULD GO PAY MY RESPECTS!
LEAVE IT TO TEPEL TO REMEMBER HER MANNERS...

WHY ARE YOU THANKING ME?

GOOD AFTER-NOON!

I JUST WANTED TO SAY THANK YOU FOR MAKING THIS LIBRARY AVAILABLE FOR US ALL TO USE!

IN THE HISTORY OF THE CONTINENT, NOT A SINGLE THING OF VALUE HAS BEEN EVER BEEN GAINED THROUGH FLATTERY.

AND QUIT GROVELING, WOULD YOU?

YOU SHOULD TREAT ME LIKE YOU WOULD ANY OTHER KID.

TO CAUICHA, EVERYTHING BOILS DOWN TO RESULTS.

AGE, CLASS, GENDER... NONE OF IT MATTERS IF YOU'RE PRODUCING SOMETHING OF VALUE.

AND BECAUSE OF THAT SINGULAR FOCUS, SHE'LL TELL YOU EXACTLY WHAT'S ON HER MIND AND EXPECT YOU TO DO THE SAME.

AFTER THAT, I'D SPOT HER AT THE LIBRARY EVERY SO OFTEN, MINGLING WITH OTHER COMMON CHILDREN.

NOT ONCE DID SHE BERATE THEM ABOUT KNOWING THEIR PLACE OR SHOW-ING PROPER RESPECT.

TEPEL! YOU PROMISED TO STOP NAGGING PEOPLE!

I AM NOT NAG-GING!

IT'S OBVIOUS YOU'RE ALREADY MAKING A CONTRI-BUTION!

WE'VE ALL SEEN HOW FAST YOU ARE AT CLEANING AND CARRYING BOOKS!

Here at the Central Library, you gotta be confident! Sell yourself! You can't defer to every—

YOU GOTTA POINT THAT STUFF OUT TO HER! YOU'RE A KAFNA NOW!

OF COURSE, THAT DOESN'T MAKE HER A *GOOD* PERSON, EITHER.

SHE'S AN OPEN BOOK. NO HIDDEN MOTIVES.

SO YOU CAN SEE SHE'S NOT A BAD PERSON, RIGHT?

...WHEN SHE GIVES YOU GRIEF, IT'S ALL RIGHT TO STAND YOUR GROUND!

In fact, you *have* to!

MY POINT IS...

RESULTS ...

IT'S PRETTY LATE, THOUGH. I KINDA DOUBT THE FACULTY ROOM IS EVEN...

WHOA! IT IS OPEN!

*IF I CAN'T FINISH THE TESTS **DURING** CLASS...*

...THEN I'LL FINISH THEM ON MY OWN TIME!

TEPEL'S EXACTLY RIGHT.

I NEED TO FOCUS.

I CAN'T BE OUT TAKING LEISURELY STROLLS AROUND THE CITY. NOT WHILE I'M BEHIND.

RTTL
RTTL
RTTL
ナラナラナラ
!
NOK NOK
HELLO? SORRY TO DISTURB...
MISTER FUMIS.
WHAT BRINGS YOU BY AT THIS HOUR?
PROFESSOR XTOH!
I PROMISE TO GET AS MUCH DONE DURING CLASS AS I CAN.
SO PLEASE, LET ME KEEP WORKING ON MY OWN TIME, TOO!
YES. AS IT IS, YOU COLLECT ALL OUR PAPERS AT THE END OF CLASS.
FOR EVERY PROBLEM I LEAVE UNDONE, I FEEL LIKE I'M FALLING THAT MUCH FURTHER BEHIND MY CLASSMATES.
...I SEE. YOU'RE SAYING YOU'D LIKE TO TAKE THE TESTS BACK TO THE DORMS TO COMPLETE AT YOUR LEISURE?

SUPPOSE I ALLOW YOU AN HOUR TO WORK ON THE REMAINDER AS YOU PLEASE.

WHERE WILL YOU FIT THE IDLE MOMENTS YOU'D NORMALLY SPEND CHATTING WITH YOUR FRIENDS?

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE HOUR OF FREE TIME YOU LOSE, AND YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO READ FOR PLEASURE?

OUT OF THE QUESTION.

HUH? WHY?!

I'VE GOT THE STAMINA! I KNOW I CAN MAN-AGE!

TH...

THEN I'LL CUT BACK ON SLEEP!

OF COURSE IT IS.

EQUALLY OR MORE SO THAN YOUR PRO-FESSIONAL PURSUITS.

IS...

IS ANY OF THAT NECES-SARY?

MISTER FUMIS.

KNK

DO YOU KNOW THE SINGLE MOST IMPOR-TANT THING IN LIFE? THE ONE ELEMENT WE ABSOLUTELY CANNOT DO WITHOUT?

...

...?!

DREAMS?

COURAGE TO STIR THE HEART?

MONEY TO PROCURE NECESSITIES?

FRIENDS?

FOOD FOR THE ENERGY TO ACT?

'Cause in my case...

IS THAT IT?

MAYBE *FAMILY?*

M...

GETTING AMPLE SLEEP!

YES. AND NOT ONLY IN TERMS OF HEALTH.

SLEEP IS CRITICAL TO ETERNAL VOWS OF LOVE.

EVEN TO EXERCISING RELIGIOUS FAITH.

NO MEANINGFUL PURSUIT CAN BE MAINTAINED WITH A MIND AND BODY TOO EXHAUSTED TO ACT.

YET CHILDREN AND ADULTS ALIKE THINK NOTHING OF SHAVING A FEW HOURS OFF. THUS I AM OBLIGED TO DRIVE THE POINT HOME.

S-SLEEP?!

MORE THAN *ANYTHING* ELSE?

B-BUT THE ONLY REASON I PASSED THE FIRST STAGE OF THE KAFNA EXAM WAS BECAUSE I WORKED NONSTOP THROUGH ALL THREE DAYS!

I WILL ADMIT THAT THERE ARE CERTAIN JUNCTURES IN OUR LIVES WHEN WE MUST PUSH ON IN ABSENCE OF SLEEP.

BUT TAKE CARE THAT THOSE BRIEF SPURTS REMAIN FEW AND FAR BETWEEN.

IN LONGER ENDEAVORS, IF YOU FIND YOURSELF OBLIGED TO SACRIFICE SLEEP TO ATTAIN SUCCESS, I WOULD SUGGEST THAT YOUR STRATEGY IS IRREVOCABLY FLAWED FROM THE OUTSET.

THEN WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO ABOUT THE TESTS?

ISN'T IT OBVIOUS? YOU MUST GET BETTER.

LEARN TO COMPLETE THE TASKS WITHIN THE ALLOTTED TIME.

HALF OF THE ANSWER LIES IN PERSISTENCE. BUT THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN THAT.

SKRT
SKRT
SKRT

BUT THAT'S EXACTLY MY PROBLEM! I DON'T KNOW HOW!

GOAL

RUNNER

...IN WHICH A SUBJECT IS ASKED TO RUN A GIVEN DISTANCE TWICE, WITH TIMES RECORDED AND COMPARED.

FWICK

THERE IS A CERTAIN SOCIAL EXPERIMENT...

CURIOUSLY, THE SUBJECT TENDS TO ACHIEVE MUCH BETTER TIMES ON THE SECOND TRIAL, EVEN THOUGH THE DISTANCE HAS NOT IN FACT CHANGED.

WHY DO YOU THINK THAT IS?

THE SECOND TIME THE SUBJECT IS ASKED TO RUN– AFTER AN AMPLE BREAK TO REST AND RECOVER– THE GOAL IS SET SLIGHTLY FURTHER AWAY. HOWEVER, UNBEKNOWNST TO THE SUBJECT...

...THE EXPERIMENTER IS RECORDING THE TIME IT TAKES HIM TO COVER THE ORIGINAL DISTANCE, *NOT* THE TIME IT TAKES TO REACH THE NEW GOAL.

TIME RECORDED HERE

THE TRUTH IS THIS.

THE HUMAN BRAIN SUCCUMBS TO LAZINESS WHEN IT SENSES SUCCESS NEAR AT HAND.

...!

WHEN THE CHALLENGE SEEMS GREATER, YOU NATURALLY WORK HARDER!

THAT'S THE ROSY INTERPRETATION. THE UNDERLYING MECHANISM IS MORE INSIDIOUS.

IT IS A NATURAL RESPONSE, MEANT TO HELP US CONSERVE OUR STRENGTH FOR MOMENTS OF CRISIS.

AS SOON AS THAT THOUGHT ENTERS YOUR MIND, YOUR BODY GOES SLACK AND YOUR WITS DULL.

"ALMOST THERE. NOT MUCH FURTHER NOW."

...?!

THEREIN LIES THE ROOT OF WHY YOU ARE UNABLE COMPLETE YOUR DAILY TESTS IN TIME.

YOU SAID YOU'D GET AS MUCH DONE DURING CLASS.

RECALL YOUR CHOICE OF WORDS A MOMENT AGO.

IT IS NO DIFFERENT FROM HOLDING THE GOALPOST TO YOUR CHEST AS YOU BEGIN TO RUN!

YOU'VE TOLD YOURSELF IT'S FINE TO STOP AT ANY POINT, AND IN DOING SO...

...YOU ENSURE THAT MIND AND SPIRIT CAN NEVER FULLY INVEST IN YOUR CAUSE!

DO YOU NOT SEE THE FLAW IN THE TARGET YOU'VE SET?

SEVENTY, EVEN *FIFTY* PERCENT BECOMES A SUFFICIENT BAR FOR COMPLACENCY. YOU PAT YOURSELF ON THE BACK FOR WHAT YOU *BELIEVE* TO HAVE BEEN A VALIANT EFFORT!

YOU MUST TELL YOURSELF THAT THE GOAL IS YET FAR AT HAND. YOU MUST DECEIVE YOUR MIND. MAKE IT THINK THE POST LIES FURTHER AFIELD.

VISUALIZE! FANTASIZE! EMPHASIZE!

IF YOU WISH TO *DEFEAT* THIS INSTINCT, YOU MUST *TRAIN* YOURSELF.

CONVINCE YOURSELF THAT A HIGHER CALLING AWAITS!

THAT IS THE FANTASY!

THAT IS THE VISION!

VIEW YOUR GOAL AS BUT A TINY WAYPOINT ON A MUCH GREATER JOURNEY!

AND ABOVE ALL ELSE, EMPHASIZE TO YOUR-SELF...

...THAT YOU *WILL* MAKE THIS CLIMB!

LEARNING HOW TO FOCUS **BEYOND** THE GOAL TO PUSH MYSELF HARDER...

I'D NEVER EVEN CONSIDERED SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

ACTIVELY **DECEIVING** MYSELF TO SQUEEZE OUT EVERY LAST BIT OF STRENGTH I HAVE...

FOR SOME, THESE TESTS WILL BE FOREVER OUT OF REACH, AND NO AMOUNT OF MASSAGED TEMPLES OR CRACKED WHIPS WILL CHANGE THAT.

WE COULD INVITE THE TOP STUDENTS AT ANY OF THE CITY'S SCHOOLS AND FIND MOST UNABLE TO COMPLETE THE TASKS WE EXPECT OF THE TRAINEES.

THERE ARE, OF COURSE, LIMITS. BOUNDARIES WE'LL NEVER SURPASS, REGARDLESS OF WHAT WE TELL OURSELVES OTHERWISE.

YOU OVERCAME THE KAFNA EXAM.

YOU'VE ALREADY DEMONSTRATED THAT YOU POSSESS THE TOOLS.

BUT YOU, MISTER FUMIS, ARE DIFFERENT.

LEARN TO COMPLETE THE PROBLEMS *WITHIN* THE ALLOTTED TIME, MISTER FUMIS.

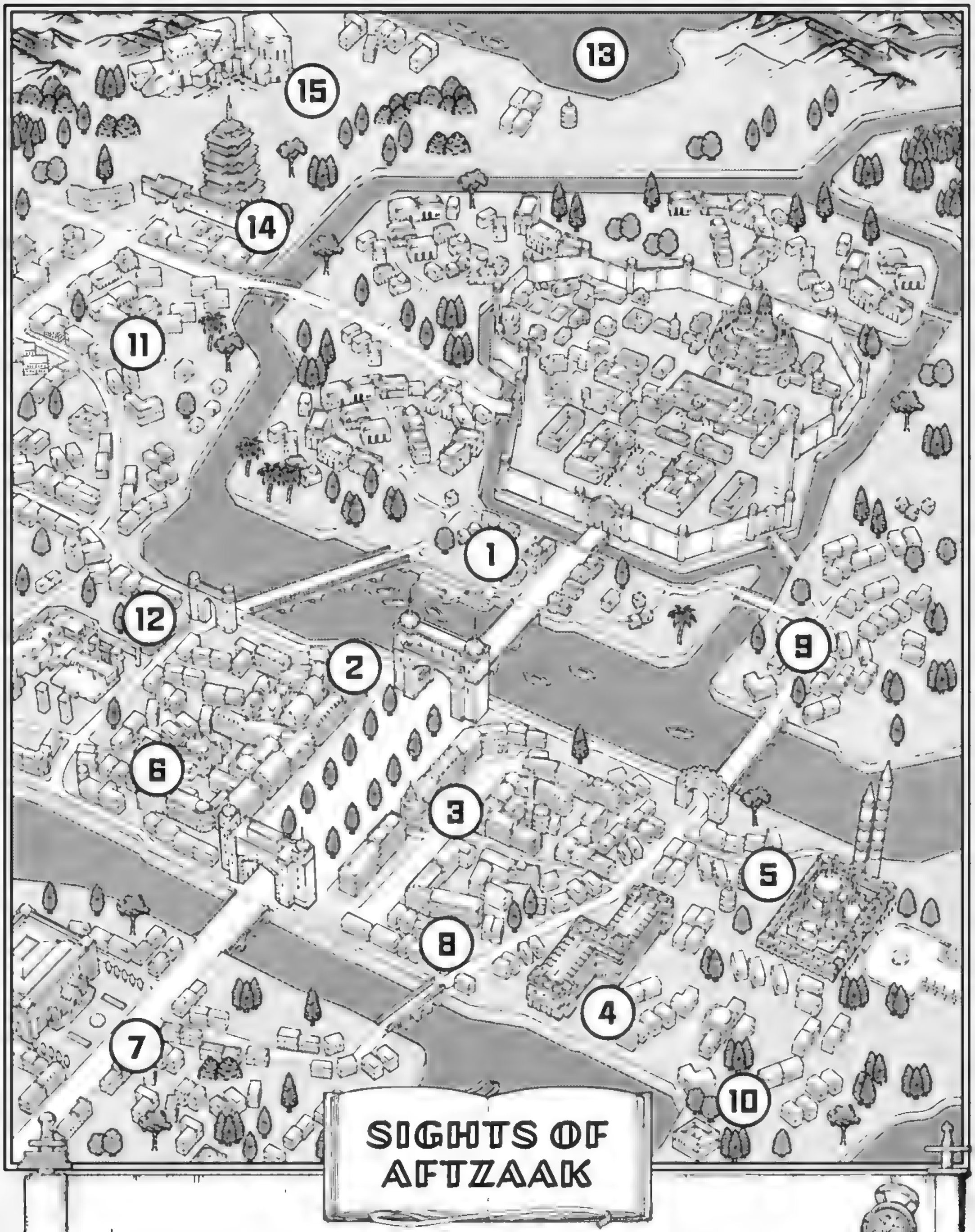
THE ONLY THING YOU LACK IS FAITH IN YOURSELF.

THAT IS ALL.

I HAVE TO RETRAIN MY MIND...

...TO GET THE MOST OUT OF EVERY AVAILABLE MOMENT.

I KNOW WHAT I NEED TO DO NOW.

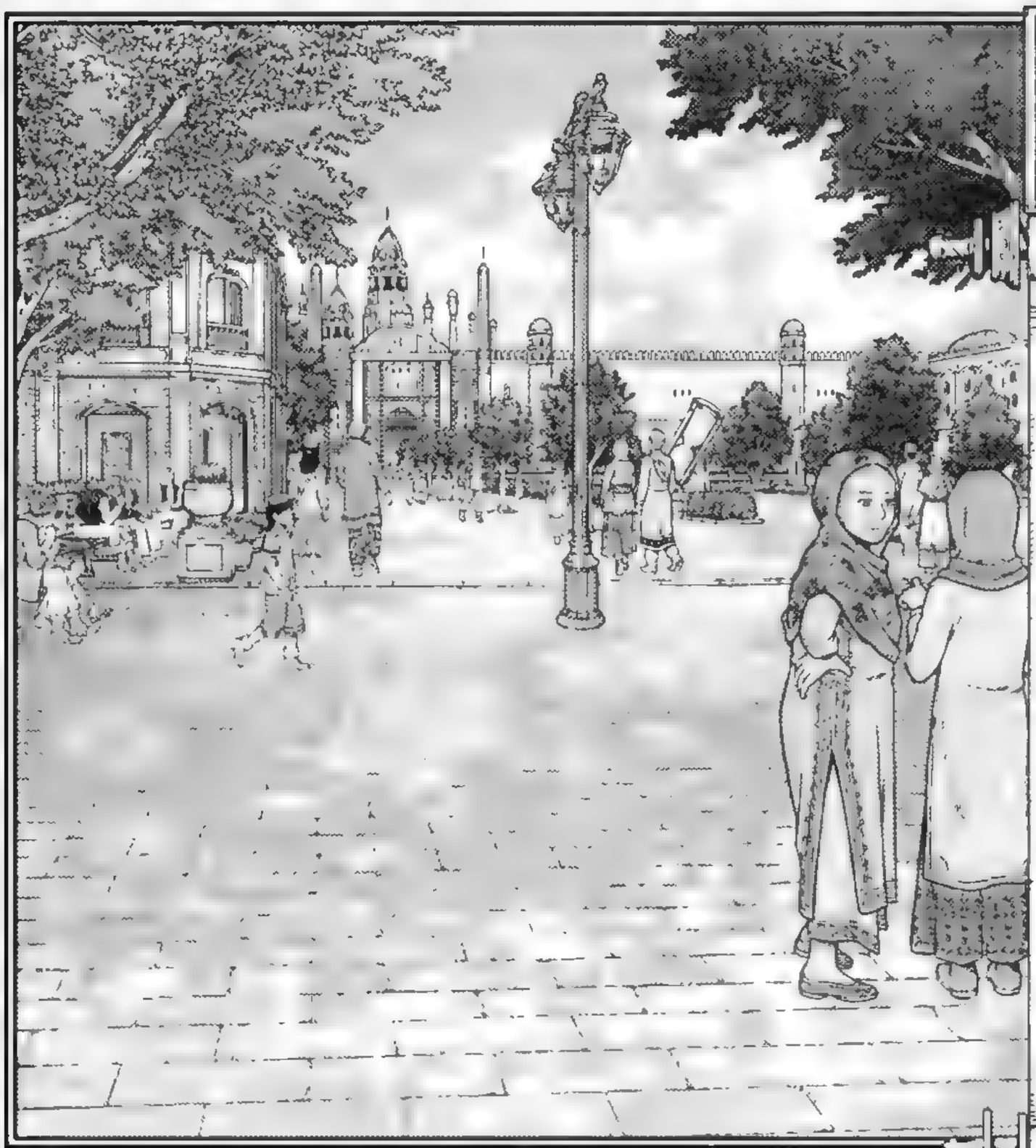


SIGHTS OF AFTZAAK

"We've a map right here in our hands. What are we waiting for?"

—Shagrazzat

① TARO SQUARE
② MAM RA ZATT
③ XOCHITOL HOZANYK
④ PACHARURAC
⑤ AFTZAANKA PALACE
⑥ TOHNE INSTITUTE, SECOND CAMPUS
⑦ CHUWEN PLAYHOUSE
⑧ QUITZE
⑨ TSUNE PRESS
⑩ NACON PAPERMILL
⑪ COCA BINDERY
⑫ AFTZAAK CITY WATCH
⑬ AH TA RIVER
⑭ ALDEBARA TEMPLE
⑮ THE GREAT NORTHERN SLUMS



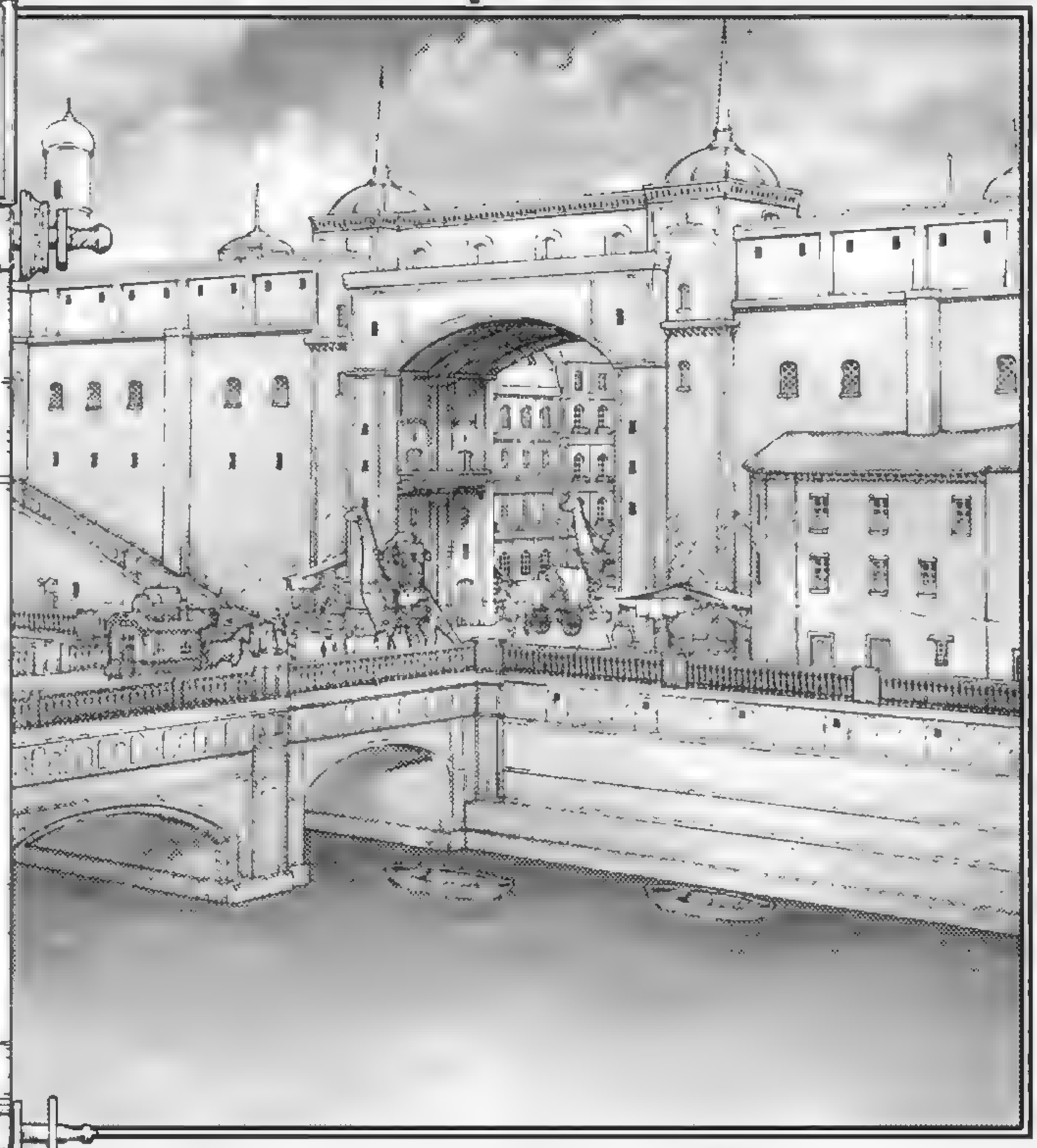
TARO SQUARE

THIS WIDE PLAZA, SITUATED JUST OUTSIDE THE CENTRAL LIBRARY'S MAIN GATE, IS THE ANNUAL SITE OF THE FESTIVAL OF GOOD TEXTS, ONE OF THE CAPITAL'S MOST CELEBRATED EVENTS. LONG AGO, THE PLOT WAS HOME TO HIS MAJESTY KING CUPUL'S BELOVED ORNAMENTAL GARDENS. DURING THE GREAT WAR, THE KING ORDERED THE GARDENS DUG UP AND USED INSTEAD TO CULTIVATE CROPS TO HELP FEED THE MASSIVE INFLUX OF REFUGEES. EVEN TODAY, RESIDENTS OF AFTZAAK REGARD THE SPACE WITH FONDNESS AND RESPECT, OFTEN AFFECTIONATELY REFERRING TO IT AS "TATER SQUARE."

"This is a place that has granted life to many."

—Taksha Cupul

MAM RA ZATT



LITERALLY "THE GATES OF HEROES," THESE MASSIVE STRUCTURES ONCE KEPT BACAB'S CASTLE TOWN SAFE FROM INVADERS. THE PORTSCULLES HAVE SINCE BEEN REMOVED, ENDING THE GATES' CAREER IN DEFENSE, YET THE STATELY ARCH REMAINS TO WELCOME ALL THOSE WHO CARRY NEW BOOKS TO BE ADDED TO THE LIBRARY'S EVER-GROWING COLLECTION.

"It is far easier to defend a gate than to assault it."

—Ryoma Korozehn

Two months earlier...

26 I Want to Kick You in the Face

I SEE... I'D HOPED FACILITIES MIGHT BE ABLE TO MAKE DO WITH A BIT LESS.

MM...

I'M VERY SORRY. IT'S JUST THAT...

THROOM

THROOM

THROOM

THROOM

MASTER STEWARD.

I'LL HEAD OVER MY-SELF AND SEE IF I CAN'T-

NO, NO. I REALIZE IT'S A LOT TO ASK.

MM... YOU CAUGHT THAT, DID YOU?

AHH... Hello, Xtoh.

I'VE REVIEWED THE LIST OF THIS YEAR'S INCOMING TRAINEES. THERE SEEMS TO BE AN ABERRATION IN THE MIX.

THE UNITER
STEWARD OF THE PERSONNEL OFFICE
BIWA XAHIBAKYEH

NOT YET.

ARE YOU, ERM, UPSET?

SHF

...MM.

I ASSUME THIS COMES AT THE TREASURY OFFICE'S BEHEST?

YES. I'M AFRAID IT'S RATHER DIFFICULT TO TURN DOWN REQUESTS FROM TREASURY.

...MM.

PHEW...

SHALL I GET YOU SOME TEA?

CENTRAL LIBRARY, TREASURY OFFICE

SENZU HIROH

I DO NOT CARE FOR EXCESS. NOT WHEN IT COMES TO...

...WRIN-KLES...

...NOR WORDS...

...NOR FIGURES.

YOU'RE ALREADY PLENTY BEAUTIFUL, MS. SENZU. ESPECIALLY FOR SOME-ONE...

...OF YOUR AGE.

NEXT TIME, STOP AT "PLENTY BEAUTI-FUL."

HOW HAS THE WORLD NOT YET DISCOVERED A MATHEMATI-CALLY-PROVEN METHOD FOR ELIMINATING WRINKLES?

L" SQUEEEEZE

L" PRESSSS

PRO-FESSOR!

PROFES-SOR XTOH! GOOD AFTER-NOON, MA'AM!

MURMUR MURMUR MURMUR MURMUR

JUST ONE. FIND ANOTHER LINE OF WORK.

DO YOU HAVE ANY TIPS OR SKIN ROUTINES YOU'D RECOMMEND I START WHILE I'M STILL YOUNG?

...AT LEAST LET ME HANG ON TO A *LITTLE* EXCITEMENT ABOUT BEING ASSIGNED TO TREASURY.

YES, MA'AM!

I TRUST YOU'RE WORKING HARD?

ICHIKO.

YUSUHI.

MERIA.

XTOH! WHAT A *PLEASANT* SURPRISE.

YOU KNOW, I HARDLY RECOGNIZED YOU UNDER ALL THOSE NEW WRINKLES.

TMP

IS THAT SO?

WELL, PERHAPS MY AVERSION IS DRIVEN BY MY SENSE OF MODESTY. I FIND IT RATHER *TACKY* TO FLAUNT MY ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR ALL THE WORLD TO SEE.

WRINKLES AND YEARS BEAR TESTAMENT TO THAT WHICH WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED IN LIFE.

IF YOU CANNOT TAKE PRIDE IN YOURS, I'D SUGGEST YOU REEVALUATE THE WAYS IN WHICH YOU'VE BEEN SPENDING YOUR TIME.

THE INCOMING TRAINEE WHO CLEARLY DOESN'T BELONG. I DEMAND AN EXPLANATION.

AND I HEARD THAT MS. SENZU...

...ALWAYS GOT MUCH HIGHER MARKS IN CLASS.

FWICK

WHSPR WHSPR

EY EY

WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH THOSE TWO?

YOU DON'T KNOW? THEY STARTED OUT TOGETHER AS TRAINEES.

AH. OF COURSE.

IT WAS *CASUALLY* SUGGESTED THAT HOUSE HAHAL'K MIGHT BE INTERESTED IN DONATING SOME VERY LARGE SUMS TO THE LIBRARY IN COMING YEARS.

THE HAHAL'K GIRL.

I'M WELL AWARE OF THE PRACTICE, AND I'M WILLING TO OVERLOOK SLIGHT DEFICIENCIES WHEN IT COMES TO THE WRITTEN STAGE.

DOESN'T EVERY INCOMING CLASS SEE ONE OR TWO TRAINEES GETTING IN ON "TREASURY EXCEPTIONS"?

TRUE, HER SCORES ON THE FIRST COMPONENT WERE A BIT LACKING, BUT I REALLY DON'T SEE THE ISSUE.

THE OVERALL ASSESSMENT WAS THAT THE GIRL WOULD BE *UNABLE TO COPE* IN AN ENVIRONMENT AS DIVERSE AS THE CAPITAL!

EVERY PROCTOR SAID THE SAME THING. SHE'S THE *WORST* THEY'VE EVER SEEN!

BUT THE PRACTICAL COMPONENT IS AN *ENTIRELY* DIFFERENT MATTER.

THE PERSONNEL OFFICE ABIDES YOUR INSATIABLE MEDDLING YEAR AFTER YEAR, BUT THIS TIME, YOU'VE GONE *TOO FAR!*

SHE STANDS TO NEGATIVELY IMPACT THE PROGRESS OF HER ENTIRE CLASS!

THIS IS NOT A PERSONAL ISSUE FOR HER TO SORT OUT.

IF WE ARE TO PROTECT THE BOOKS, WE REQUIRE *FUNDING*.

NO WONDER I GET SO MANY WRINKLES.

MEANWHILE, THOSE OF US IN TREASURY STRUGGLE ON WITH WEARY HEARTS, ATTEMPTING TO PRESERVE A BASELINE OF ACCEPTABLE SERVICE.

OUR LABORS HERE AT THE LIBRARY GENERATE NO PROFIT OF THEIR OWN...

...WHICH MEANS THAT OUR OPERATING BUDGET RELIES ALMOST ENTIRELY ON TAXES AND OUTSIDE DONATIONS.

TREASURY HAS *REPEATEDLY* CALLED FOR THE INTRODUCTION OF ADMISSION AND LENDING FEES, ONLY FOR GENERAL AFFAIRS TO BAT THE SUGGESTION AWAY FOR LOVE OF ITS UNTENABLE IDEALS.

SURELY IT'S PRUDENT FOR US TO CORRAL *ONE* PROBLEM CHILD IF DOING SO ENABLES US TO FUND THE ACQUISITION OF SEVERAL RARE AND VALUABLE TEXTS.

YES. ABSOLUTE DROSS, THIS ONE.

THE LIBRARY IS ONLY AS GOOD AS ITS KAFNA.

FLICK

WHAT WAS THE GIRL'S NAME? MEDINA?

OH, YOU NEEDN'T REMIND ME OF THAT.

CLATTER

BUT I SUGGEST YOU FIND A WAY TO *FILTER* THAT DROSS...

THRMP

...AND TURN IT INTO SOMETHING WE CAN USE.

THAT *IS* PERSONNEL'S JOB, IS IT NOT?

...LET ME MAKE ONE THING VERY CLEAR.

CONSIDER IT A SHOW OF RESPECT.

REST ASSURED, I ONLY AGREED TO THE YOUNG LADY'S ADMISSION BECAUSE I HAVE *UTMOST* FAITH IN YOUR ABILITIES.

SNAP

YES, YES.

*TALK ABOUT CONFIDENCE... I DON'T THINK I'VE SEEN **ANYONE** TALK DOWN TO PROFESSOR XTOH.*

...NO MATTER WHAT PERSONAL CONVICTIONS SHE MAY HOLD.

THE GIRL IS *NOT* DROSS...

EEP!

THE TOTAL FOR THE MATERIALS COLUMN IS OFF.

FWICK

FWAP

Y-YOU'RE DONE *AL-READY?!*

11°ラララララララ

FLK FLK FLK FLK FLK FLK FLK FLK

SORRY TO BOTHER YOU, MS. SENZU. COULD YOU CHECK THESE FIGURES?

GIVE THEM HERE.

YES, MA'AM!

I'LL NOT STAND FOR *ANY* MARGIN OF ERROR! NOT ONE QUIPU!

LOOK ALIVE, PEOPLE! WANDER-ING MINDS MAKE FOR SLOPPY WORK!

THESE FUNDS REPRESENT THE SWEAT AND BLOOD OF THE CITIZENS!

LET'S HOPE YOU AND I CAN GET ALONG.

WELL, MEDINA...

PRESS

YOU'RE A LUCKY GIRL, MEDINA.

HE WAS THIS CLOSE...

...TO PUTTING THE DRUUJ ON YOUR FOREHEAD.

BE GRATEFUL TO YOUR FATHER.

GASP

AT HOME...

...AND AT SCHOOL...

...MY STUDIES WERE MY SOLACE. THEY WERE THE ARENA IN WHICH I KNEW I COULD NEVER BE BESTED.

SHOW ME THE WAY, FOR I AM FRIGHTENED.

O LORD VIRACOCHA...

HERE AT THE LIBRARY...

BUT HERE...

YOU know it!

I'VE BEEN PERFORMING ON STAGE SINCE I WAS THREE YEARS OLD!

Y-YOUR LAST NAME IS CATL, RIGHT? A-AS IN THE HOUSE OF MASTER DANC-ERS?

I...

I JUST LIKE TO WRITE.

HOW'D YOU GET SUCH PERFECT PEN-MANSHIP?

WOWEE! YOUR NOTES COULDA COME STRAIGHT FROM A PRINTING PRESS!

IT'S AS IF THE STUDIES THEM-SELVES ARE JUST A SIDE NOTE.

WHEAT PASTE ENDS UP COST-ING *MORE* 'CAUSE IT DOESN'T *LAST!*

HIDE GLUE'S FULL OF IMPURI-TIES!

BUT THE LIBRARY HAS TO WORK WITHIN ITS BUDGET! WHEAT PASTE IS MORE ECONOMICAL!

BOOK REPAIR? HIDE GLUE, ALL THE WAY.

NEARLY EVERY-ONE ELSE HERE...

IT JUST SEEMED LIKE A FUN CHAL-LENGE.

HUH?

WHY?

HOLD ON. YOU'VE LEARNED TO RECITE THE *ENTIRE* EPIC OF LAMIIA BY HEART?

TAK

カ...

NO, IT'S IMPORTANT FOR THEM TO BE EASY TO UNDER-STAND.

YOU SHOULD STICK TO THE BASIC METHODS, JUST TO BE SAFE.

BUT SOLVING VIA THE ZARUD FUNCTION IS SO MUCH MORE ELEGANT!

IT'S IMPORTANT FOR PROOFS TO LOOK *COOL!*

ARE YOU KIDDING ME? THE SUBSTITUTION METHOD IS THE FASTER WAY TO SOLVE.

SEE? IT TAKES ONE LESS STEP.

THEN WHAT IS *YOUR* THEORY, SIR ALV?! IF THE UNDISCOV-ERED EIGHTH ELEMENT ISN'T SOUND, WHAT ELSE COULD IT BE?!

IF THE PROS CAN'T FIGURE IT OUT, MY GUESS IS IT DOESN'T EXIST ON THIS PLANET.

AHA!

SOUND? IT'S JUST VIBRA-TIONS CARRIED THROUGH THE AIR. THAT MAKES IT SKY MANA, DUH.

I THINK IT'S GREAT THAT THEY'RE EXTEND-ING SUFFRAGE TO THE GENERAL POPULACE. I'M JUST SAYING IT SEEMS LIKE THEY'RE LETTING *EMOTION* SWAY THEIR VOTES.

OH, I TOTALLY AGREE! WITH THE SHIFT TO POPULAR ELECTIONS, IT'S GONNA BE ALL ABOUT WHO CAN DELIVER THE MOST ROUSING SPEECH!

...EXISTS WRAPPED UP IN A WORLD ALL HER OWN.

THEY'RE NOT HUMAN. THEY'RE *FREAKS!*

N'G- WUH?

MORNING ALREADY?

TAAA

TARRP

KEEP IT UP! YOU GOT THIS!

...

Ugh... I'm exhausted...

WHEW~

HFF~

HFF...

HFF...

KRNCH

SWP

KRNCH

KRNCH

KRNCH

KRNCH

HOW ARE YOU TODAY, MISS MEDINA?

GOOD MORNING!

...WHAT?

---?!

FWIP

I HAD A CHANCE TO SPEAK WITH PROFESSOR XTOH LAST NIGHT! SHE SHARED SOME INSIGHT I THOUGHT WE BOTH MIGHT BENEFIT FROM.

WHIRL

SEE, ACCORDING TO THE PROFESSOR, THE KEY TO COMPLETING OUR TESTS ON TIME HAS TO DO WITH GETTING INTO THE RIGHT MINDSET!

KRNCH

KRNCH

AND THAT GOT ME THINKING. WHAT IF THE THREE OF US WERE TO-

PSST!

HEY!

THEO FUMIS, GET A HOLD OF YOURSELF!

MISS SYTLAH ...?

Most believers of Asin lived in cities.

UM... YEAH...

I'M FROM A PRETTY SMALL FARMING COMMU-NITY.

LEMME GUESS. WHERE YOU GREW UP, EVERYONE PRACTICED MANACCHA.

SYTLAH CUEH

I'M WILLING TO BET THAT THE ONLY BRAND OF ASIN YOU'VE RUN INTO IS THE HUMA.

But, hey, that makes two of us.

DURING THE EXAM, SHE AND I WERE ASSIGNED TO THE SAME VENUE FOR THE PRACTICAL COMPONENT. YOU WOULDN'T *BELIEVE* THE THINGS I HEARD HER SAY TO OTHER HOPEFULS.

THE AKINI, ON THE OTHER HAND... WELL, THEY'RE THE HANDFUL STILL CLINGING TO THE WHOLE PIEDMONT THING.

THAT'S THE DENOMINATION MOST FOLLOWERS LIVING IN AFTZAAK SUBSCRIBE TO. AND NOWADAYS, WE HUMA ARE PRETTY RELAXED ABOUT OTHER FAITHS. WE DON'T GO AROUND PICKING FIGHTS.

TALK ABOUT STUBBORN OPTIMISM...

!! DA-DUM !!

THE WAY I SEE IT, REJECTION IS STILL INTERACTION! WE'VE TAKEN OUR FIRST STEP TOWARD BEING FRIENDS!

BUT, WELL...

DID YOU FORGET THE FILTH SHE SPAT AT YOU THE OTHER DAY?!

THEN YOU KNOW ENOUGH TO KEEP YOUR DISTANCE!

BUT I'VE STUDIED ABOUT THE AKINI! I KNOW THEIR HISTORY!

NO... I REMEMBER. AND I HAVE TO ADMIT I WAS A LITTLE SURPRISED.

...THERE'S LOTS OF RELIGIONS OUT THERE, AND LOTS OF PEOPLE ALL WITH THEIR OWN BELIEFS.

BUT YOU START TO STUDY, AND PRETTY SOON YOU REALIZE...

WHSPR WHSPR

AND THEN YOU GET TO A PLACE LIKE AFTZAAK, WITH ALL THESE DIFFERENT RACES LIVING TOGETHER, AND IT BECOMES PRETTY CLEAR THAT THE BEST WAY TO GET ALONG IS TO NOT DIG TOO DEEP INTO CERTAIN TOPICS.

LOOK, I WAS BORN TO A DEVOUT ASIN HOUSE-HOLD.

AND I GREW UP BELIEVING VIRACOCHA IS THE ONE TRUE GOD.

IT'S ONLY ONE YEAR.

YOU CAN BE DANG SURE THE SUPERVI-SORS WON'T BE ASSIGNING YOU TWO TO THE SAME OFFICE.

YOU EITHER LET HER WALK ALL OVER YOU, OR YOU AVOID HER ENTIRELY. I RECOM-MEND THE LATTER.

YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND, THE AKINI ARE *RELENTLESS*. THEY EVEN INSIST THAT VIRACOCHA CREATED THE MOTHER SPIRIT ATLATONAN!

GOING BY MEDINA'S COMMENTS, I'D SAY IT'S PRETTY CLEAR SHE'S GOT NO INTEREST IN PLAYING BY THOSE RULES.

KRACK!!

YOU DIDN'T SEE? WELL...

Some 800 years ago...

...when the Kadoe Empire was at its height...

...and the people of the masks ruled nearly every corner of the continent...

There they stayed until imperial rule began to wane, at which point the Jagwa struck off to invade a small country in the north—the home of the Hydiah.

...there was a race known as the Jagwa, who pledged themselves to the Kadoe and served as mercenaries in their armies.

The children they sired—neither truly Jagwa nor Hydiah—would in time take on their own identity.

THEIR ANCESTORS WERE BARBARIANS. MOUNTED RAIDERS WHO PREYED UPON THE WEAK.

THE HYRON WERE THUS DESPERATE FOR SOMETHING TO CALL THEIR OWN. SOME SOURCE OF PRIDE.

The people began to refer to themselves as the "Hyron"—in their tongue, "the noble ones."

Known as Asin, it promised salvation to all in exchange for strict observance of the prayers and precepts set forth by Viracocha, the one true god.

And as this new people found its feet, so too did a new religion.

ASIN OFFERED HOPE. IT SPOKE OF THE HYRON AS THE CHOSEN ONES, DESTINED TO RULE OVER ALL OTHER RACES FROM ON HIGH. THE PEOPLE CLUNG TO THAT TEACHING, RADICAL AS IT WAS, AND ALLOWED IT TO DEFINE THEM.

NEITHER COULD THEY OUTSHINE THEIR NEIGHBORS THE RAKTA, LAUDED ARCHITECTS OF MODERN CIVILIZATION AND HEROES ABLE TO TOPPLE IMPERIAL RULE.

BUT THEY WERE A YOUNG PEOPLE, WITH LITTLE HISTORY AND NO ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO POINT TO. THEY HAD NO WORKS TO RIVAL THOSE OF THE HAUPI KINGDOM OR KADOE EMPIRE.

IT WAS BOTH THE BANNER THAT KEPT THE HYRON UNITED, AND THE DEEP-SEATED SENSE OF INADEQUACY THAT TORMENTED THEIR PSYCHE.

"CAPTURING THE PIEDMONT"—THAT WAS WHAT THEY CALLED IT, FOR ONCE THE FOOTHILLS WERE SECURE, THEY ALONE WOULD BE ABLE TO ASCEND THE PEAK.

HEY, ALV?

I NEVER SEE YOU DO MORNING PRAYERS. DO YOU NOT BELIEVE IN GOD?

GOD?

...

I'M NOT SAYING I BELIEVE IN VIRACOCHA.

JUST THAT I AGREE THE WORLD WAS CREATED BY SOME KINDA HIGHER POWER.

YOU DO?!

I THOUGHT FOR SURE YOU'D GO OFF ABOUT HOW THE WHOLE CONCEPT IS UNEMPIRICAL!

SURE, I BELIEVE IN GOD.

...I THINK WE'RE GONNA FIND...

...THAT IT INVOLVED A VERY LONG STRING OF EVENTS, EACH ONE AS IMPROBABLE AS THE LAST.

BUT REGARDLESS OF THE SPECIFIC MECHANISMS...

THE FIELD OF NATURAL PHILOSOPHY STILL HAS A LONG WAY TO GO IN UNCOVERING HOW EXACTLY THE WORLD CAME ABOUT.

THE REASON I DON'T BOTHER WITH PRAYERS...

...IS BECAUSE I DON'T HAVE ANY INTEREST IN *INTERPRETATIONS* OF GOD THAT INVOLVE MAKING UP A BUNCH OF RULES TO FOLLOW IN ORDER TO FIND SALVATION.

AND I JUST FIGURE...

...HOW DOES ANY OF THAT HAPPEN WITHOUT SOMEONE RUNNING THE SHOW?

THAT'S ALL.

...SOMETHING TELLS ME IT WOULD WANT US TO LIVE OUR LIVES MORE FREELY.

IF THERE IS A SUPREME BEING...

WHY'D YOU CUT ME OFF?!

MRMPH!

...AND LET'S NOT FORGET WHAT ASIN GOT UP TO DURING THE GREAT W—

LIKE THE KADOE PUSHING THEIR RELIGION ON EVERYONE FOR CENTURIES...

I'LL AGREE WITH YOU THERE. WHAT IS IT WITH MONOTHEISTIC FAITHS AND BEING SO DANG INTOLERANT?

IF YOU ASK ME...

...IT'S IMPORTANT TO HAVE *SOMETHING* TO BELIEVE IN.

I DON'T THINK ANYONE IN THE WORLD HAS THE STRENGTH TO KEEP PUSHING ONWARD ALL ALONE.

MAYBE ADHERING TO THE HABITS OF FAITH ISN'T SO SILLY...

...IF IT MEANS WE HAVE SOMETHING TO STEADY OURSELVES AGAINST WHEN IT COMES TIME TO FACE ADVERSITY.

...WOULD BE THE YOUNG MEN WHO HAD BEEN FIT AND HEALTHY WHEN THE MASSACRE BEGAN. INSTEAD, IT WAS OFTEN THE WOMEN AND THE ELDERLY THEY FOUND CLINGING TO LIFE.

WHEN THE FIGHTING CAME TO AN END AND THE GREAT MAGI WENT TO FREE THE HAUPI, THEY EXPECTED THAT THE BULK OF THOSE STILL BREATHING...

THE SURVIVORS ALL SHARED ONE COMMON TRAIT.

THE *CAPTURING THE PIEDMONT* DOCTRINE CONVINCED THE HYRON TO TRY WIPING OUT AN ENTIRE RACE. THERE'S NO DOUBT FAITH CAN LEAD PEOPLE TO DO HORRIBLE THINGS.

BUT AT THE SAME TIME, IT'S FAITH THAT IS SAID TO HAVE DELIVERED THE HAUPI FROM THEIR ORDEAL.

THEY SAY THAT THE ONES WHO MADE IT THROUGH...

...WERE THOSE WHO NEVER ABANDONED THEIR DAILY HYMNS AND PRAYERS, EVEN WHEN ALL HOPE SEEMED LOST.

RMMM BBLLL

FWFWAP

FWAP

FWAP

FWAP

CHATTER

CHATTER

CHATTER

SKREEE

SKREEEEEE

Ahahahaha! No way!

And guess what...?!

SZZZZL

SOME-THING'S CHANGED.

MY BRAIN'S MORE FIRED UP THAN BE-FORE. I CAN FEEL IT!

BUT...!

I RAN OUT OF TIME AGAIN.

I'LL TRY AGAIN TOMORROW!

OH!

...BUT I CAN DO THIS! I KNOW I CAN!

IT MIGHT TAKE ME A FEW MORE TRIES...

I BET THIS IS THE WAY KIDS WHO GREW UP IN THE CITY FEEL. THEY'RE USED TO USING THEIR MINDS LIKE THIS BECAUSE THEY'VE BEEN COMPETING AGAINST THE BEST!

OHH! YEAH, SO THE TRICK WITH THAT ONE IS TO...

IT'S ABOUT THIS PROBLEM HERE...

HM?

PROFES-SOR AIKO? MAY I ASK YOU SOME-THING?

I NEED YOUR HELP!

AYA!

LIKE THE ONE ABOUT...

COULD YOU SHOW ME A FASTER WAY TO SOLVE THE FINANCE PROBLEMS ON TODAY'S TEST?

SURE. SO WHAT YOU WANT TO DO FIRST IS SUBSTITUTE THE DISTANCE BEING TRAV-ELED, AND THEN...

AW...

WOULD YOU LOOK AT THAT? THE MASTER'S INSTRUCTING THE SLAVE.

HI

CLATTER

TNK

SST

GOT SOME-THING TO SAY?

FWP



HUH?

KER-WHAM

KRSH

H...

HOLD ON, NOW...

FRSHHHHH

WE CAN'T HAVE ANY FIGHTIN', Y'KNOW?

THERE, THERE. YOU'LL LIVE.

SWIP

...thanks in no small part to the Creyak they'd enslaved to do their bidding.

After the fall of the Masked Empire, the Rakta soared to the forefront of continental civilization...

THANKS TO THE PART THEY PLAYED IN THE EMISSARY'S DEFEAT, THE CREYAK WOULD AT LAST SECURE A HOME OF THEIR OWN, ALONG WITH NEW PROMINENCE AS ONE OF THE SEVEN LANDED RACES.

But their celebration did not last long. Shortly after the war, the Emissary of Wormwood descended upon the continent.

Ultimately, the coastal-dwelling Rakta—those opposed to Creyak enslavement—would emerge victorious, and the system would be abolished.

The Creyak's bondage would persist until 121 years prior to the present day, when Verbois, High Priest of the Creyak, published "A Declaration of Freedom by and for the Creyak People," splitting Rakta society in two and sparking the War on Land and Sea.

EVENIN', THEO.

OH!

YOU'RE HERE! I'M GLAD YOU COULD MAKE IT, OHG-

GAH!

INLAND FEATURES

COASTAL FEATURES

GOING BY AYA'S FEATURES, SHE'S ALMOST CERTAINLY A DESCENDANT OF THE INLAND RAKTA, WHO FOUGHT TO KEEP SLAVERY INTACT.

AND BECAUSE OF THAT, SHE MIGHT BE PARTICULARLY VERSED IN AND SENSITIVE TO THAT ERA OF HER PEOPLE'S HISTORY.

UM... ARE YOU, UH... *COLD?*

OH, THIS LITTLE ITEM?

THEO SAYS HE WANTS TO TALK TONIGHT, SO I'M HEADIN' OUT FOR A BIT.

SAY WHAT ?!

W-WELL, YOU CAN'T GO OUT LOOKING LIKE THAT!

HERE! WRAP THIS AROUND YOUR SHOULDERS!

...AND SO HERE I AM.

YOU MEAN ...

YOU'RE OFF TO SEE A BOY?

FOR A SECRET, LATE-NIGHT RENDEZVOUS?!

Wow, you two really move fast!

ﾅﾉ BLUUUSH おおお

DOES IT HURT?

OH, I CAN SEE IT. IT'S PRETTY RED.

SQUARE IN THE SHOULDER.

YUP. RIGHT HERE.

THAT'S WHERE THE KICK LANDED, ISN'T IT?

STILL...

HONESTLY, I'M THINKIN' AYA MIGHT'VE GONE *TOO* FAR, AIMING A KICK THAT HARD AT SOMEONE'S *FACE*.

YES! TONS!!

...I GUESS I GOTTA ADMIT...

...THERE'S A LI'L BIT OF *HAP-PINESS* TO THIS STING.

UM...

I'M GONNA TRY THAT THING I EXPLAINED JUST NOW.

IF IT'S UNCOM-FORTABLE, JUST SAY THE WORD.

HEY. TURN YOUR BACK TO ME.

HUH?

WOWZA!




GOOD. I'M GLAD TO HEAR IT.


IT'S LIKE THE PAIN'S SLIPPING RIGHT AWAY.
IT FEELS SO COOL.



MEDINA SAID A TERRIBLE THING TO ME...

...BUT I STILL WANTED TO BELIEVE WE COULD TALK IT OUT.

AT FIRST, I FELT THE SAME WAY AS YOU. I THOUGHT AYA HAD GONE TOO FAR.

JUDGING BY THE HISTORY OF THE CONTINENT...

...YOU'D ALMOST THINK TALKING IS *NEVER* ENOUGH TO SOLVE MISUNDER-STANDINGS.

NOW I'M THINK-ING...

...THAT MAYBE I WAS BEING TOO NAÏVE.

BUT IN THE END...

...THE RADICAL BELIEFS HELD BY THE FEW SEEPED INTO COMMON OPINION ...

...SWELLING UP UNTIL THEY SPURRED THE MASSACRE OF AN ENTIRE RACE.

THE CALM VOICE OF REASON WAS DROWNED OUT BY ANGRY, IMPULSIVE SHOUTS.

...AND DISPEL THE AWFUL RU-MORS THAT CIRCLED AMONG PARTS OF HYRON SO-CIETY.

...THE HAUPI PEOPLE CLUNG FER-VENTLY TO THE BELIEF THAT THEY COULD TALK IT OUT. THAT THEY COULD MAKE THE HYRON SEE THE ERROR OF THEIR WAYS...

IN THE EARLY DAYS AFTER THE EMISSARY'S DEFEAT...

...BEFORE THE HYRON'S PERSECUTION OF THE HAUPI REALLY INTENSIFIED...

MAYBE THERE ARE TIMES, WHEN HONOR AND LIVES ARE AT STAKE...

...THAT WE *CAN'T* TRUST IN THE POWER OF WORDS. TIMES WHEN THE ONLY OPTION IS TO FACE OUR FOE WITH SWORD IN HAND.

"Beats me..."

My "Beats me!" pose.

What's that?

BEATS ME!!

YUP!

YEAH, ACTUALLY. UP UNTIL MY LAST FEW YEARS AT HOME.

DID YOU GO THROUGH THAT, TOO?

HEY, WHEN YOU WERE A KID...

...WERE YOU EVER TEASED ABOUT YOUR MIXED BACK-GROUND?

I SPENT ALL MY TIME CAREFULLY WATCHING THE EXPRESSIONS OF THE FACES AROUND ME...

...WONDERING WHAT I COULD DO TO MAKE MYSELF FIT IN...

THE OTHER KIDS WOULDN'T LET ME HANG OUT WITH THEM.

THEY'D HURL INSULTS AT ME...

...AND SOME-TIMES EVEN ROCKS.

...UNTIL AT SOME POINT I REALIZED...

...I'D LEARNED TO SENSE EVERY TINY SHIFT IN THE GAZE OF ANYONE NEARBY.

WHEN I LOOK AT MEDINA...

...I SEE EYES JUST LIKE MINE.

...I'VE KNOWN WITH-OUT A DOUBT.

...WHEN SHE PULLED OUT THAT KNIFE AND RAN IT ALONG HER OWN PALM...

RIGHT FROM OUR FIRST DAY TOGETHER...

SHE'S IN A NEW PLACE, UNCERTAIN WHERE SHE STANDS...

...AND SHE'S SWIPING THE AIR WITH HER BLADE TRYING TO SECURE A SPACE OF HER OWN.

THE LOOK IN MEDINA'S EYES IS *FEAR*.

I WAS HOPIN' I COULD BE FRIENDS WITH HER, NOW THAT WE'VE GOT THAT EXPERIENCE IN COMMON...

...AND ALSO 'CAUSE I KNOW HOW ROUGH IT IS TO FEEL LIKE YOU'RE ALL ALONE.

THE MOMENT SHE STEPPED FOOT IN AFTZAAK, SHE BECAME PART OF THE MINORITY...

...JUST LIKE *WE* WERE EVERY DAY OF OUR LIVES BACK HOME.

I JUST WANTED TO GET AWAY TO THE BIG CITY AND HAVE A REAL JOB.

THAT'S PRETTY MUCH THE ONLY GOAL THAT COULD GET ME TO SIT DOWN AND STUDY.

I FEEL BAD SAYIN' IT AS A KAFNA...

...BUT I WAS *TOTALLY* UNINTERESTED IN BOOKS AND READING AS A KID.

...IS FINDIN' A WAY FOR EVERYONE TO SMILE AND GET ALONG.

I GUESS ALL I'M REALLY AFTER...

BEFORE PEOPLE HAVE ANY CHANCE OF GETTING ALONG...

...THEY NEED TO BE WELL INFORMED ABOUT THE WORLD.

BUT THEN, AS I STARTED TO GET INTO IT...

...IT FINALLY DAWNED ON ME.

NOW THAT I'M HERE AT THE LIBRARY, I'M REALLY GLAD I TOOK THIS PATH.

BUT WHAT DO I KNOW?

AS FAR AS OUR CLASS IS CONCERNED, I'M STILL JUST DEAD WEIGHT.

AND THE WAY I SEE IT...

...AS LONG AS YOU'RE TRYIN' YOUR BEST, THAT'S ALL THAT MAT-TERS!

SURE, WE GOT OFF TO A SLOW START...

...BUT IF THERE'S ONE THING I'M SURE OF...

...IT'S THIS.

OHGGA!

WE HAVEN'T LOST YET!

THERE'S A JOB HERE FOR EACH OF US. SOMETHING THAT ONLY WE CAN DO!

YEAH!



FINE. IF THAT'S HOW IT IS HERE, I'M DONE.

...BY FOOLS WHO SPIT ON MY HOUSE'S GOOD NAME.

I'D RATHER QUIT THAN BE SUR-ROUNDED...

AND WHAT THEN?

GO CRAWLING BACK HOME?

IF THIS IS LIFE AS A KAFNA, WHO NEEDS IT?

LETTER OF RESIG-NATION

THERE'S NO PLACE FOR ME THERE, EITHER.

...I'LL STILL BE UNWANTED.

NO MATTER WHERE I GO OR WHAT I DO...

SHK

SWIP

!!

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH! WE NEED TO STEP IN AND PUT THAT SPOILED LITTLE BRAT IN HER PLACE!

HEAR, HEAR!

Yeah! Totally too much!

WE CAN'T TAKE ANY MORE!

IT'S TOO MUCH!

WE'VE ALREADY DISCUSSED THIS. FOR THE TIME BEING, WE ARE *NOT* TO INTERVENE. THE TRAINEES MUST BE GIVEN THE CHANCE TO WORK IT OUT THEM-SELVES.

IF WE LET REMARKS LIKE THAT SLIDE, NOT TO MENTION THE *VIOLENCE* THEY'VE NOW PROVOKED, IT CALLS THE JUDGMENT OF THE ENTIRE PERSONNEL OFFICE INTO QUESTION!

I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE THE WORDS THAT CAME OUT OF HER MOUTH!

IN ALLOWING THE TRAINEES TO OVERCOME THIS DILEMMA BY THEMSELVES, WE ARM THEM WITH A GREAT SOURCE OF STRENGTH FOR THEIR YEARS AHEAD.

IF THEY CAN'T LEARN TO LOOK PAST SUCH DIFFERENCES, THEY WON'T BE MUCH OF AN ASSET TO OUR RANKS.

EVENTUALLY, ALL THE TRAINEES WILL BE OBLIGED TO INTERACT WITH PATRONS WHOSE BELIEFS CONTRADICT THEIR OWN.

PROFESSOR.

MAYBE SO, BUT AT SOME POINT, WE HAVE TO-

...THAT SHE ONLY MADE IT THIS FAR BECAUSE OF HER FATHER'S FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS.

PERHAPS IT'S TIME WE INFORM MISS HAHAL'K...

NO.

IF SHE HASN'T FIGURED IT OUT FOR HERSELF BY NOW, LET'S NOT SPOIL HER BLISS.

YES! THAT IS A *GREAT* IDEA!

THAT OUGHTA FIX HER LITTLE ATTITUDE!

AT THE PRESENT MOMENT, MEDINA'S ONLY REAL HURDLE INVOLVES HER INTERPERSONAL SKILLS.

IN TERMS OF RAW ABILITY, SHE'S MORE THAN CAPABLE OF PERFORMING WHATEVER DUTIES THE LIBRARY ASSIGNS HER.

ALL WE NEED WORRY ABOUT IS CULTIVATING THE GIRL'S POTENTIAL.

IT'S NOT OFTEN I ENCOUNTER A TRAINEE BOLD ENOUGH TO TRY AND STARE ME DOWN.

IF WE CAN JUST CONVINCE HER TO CHANNEL THAT INDOMITABLE SPIRIT TOWARD SOMETHING PRODUCTIVE, I THINK SHE'LL GO QUITE FAR.

FRANKLY, SHE'S STARTING TO GROW ON ME.

BUT IS HELPING ONE TRAINEE SUCCEED WORTH ESTRANGING THE REST OF HER CLASS?

I'M PARTICULARLY WORRIED ABOUT THE IMPACT SHE'LL HAVE ON THEO AND OHGGA.

INITIALLY, I WASN'T TOO PLEASED ABOUT THE NUISANCE I'D FELT TREASURY WAS DUMPING IN OUR LAPS.

BUT NOW I'M WONDERING IF WE AREN'T SEEING ANOTHER TYPE OF TALENT. ONE THAT THE CURRENT ENTRANCE EXAM FAILS TO ACCOUNT FOR.

HMPH.

YES. THEY'VE EACH TROD A PATH QUITE UN-LIKE THOSE OF THEIR PEERS.

THOSE TWO ARE OF A WHOLE OTHER CALIBER.

MOST OF THE OTHER TRAINEES HAVE BEEN PRACTICING SPLIT-SECOND EVALUATIONS OF TEXTS FOR YEARS, THANKS TO THEIR TIME IN PREP SCHOOL. THEO AND OHGGA MIGHT APPEAR TO BE STRUGGLING FOR NOW, BUT DON'T LET THAT DECEIVE YOU.

THEY'RE NOT ABOUT TO FALTER BECAUSE OF A FEW MORE PRIGGISH COMMENTS ABOUT HERITAGE.

YET THEY ENDURED AND STAND HERE AS KAFNA TODAY.

THANKS TO THEIR OUTWARD APPEARANCE, THEY DOUBT-LESS SUFFERED THROUGH CHILD-HOOD IN WAYS WE CAN HARDLY IMAGINE.

IF YOU ASK ME, MEDINA'S GOT A RESPONSIBILITY TO RECOGNIZE HER OUTDATED IDEAS ABOUT THE WORLD AND FIGURE OUT HOW TO CHANGE THEM!

SHE'S AKINI! SHE'S GOT A DIRECT LINE BACK TO THE IDEOLOGY THAT DECIMATED THE HAUPI!

THAT DOESN'T MAKE IT ACCEPTABLE TO LET THE HAHAL'K GIRL'S BEHAVIOR SLIDE!

HANG ON!

HM ?!

...BUT THE FACT REMAINS THAT THOSE BELIEFS FORM A PART OF WHO SHE IS. IT'S ABSURD TO DEMAND SHE ABANDON THEM NOW, ON THE CUSP OF ADULTHOOD.

ESPECIALLY THE ONES TIED TO HER RELIGIOUS FAITH.

THEY MIGHT BE THOUGHT OUTDATED OR PERVERSE OR RADICAL BY THE MAJORITY OF TODAY...

?

I'M SURPRISED, PUPUTO. I'D HAVE THOUGHT YOU KNEW BETTER BY NOW.

WE CAN'T EXPECT MISS HAHAL'K TO REDEFINE THE CONVICTIONS SHE'S GROWN UP ACCEPTING ALL HER LIFE.

BUT IN THE END...

...THOSE MORALS ARE LITTLE MORE THAN OPINIONS IN VOGUE.

TRUE, OVER ANY GIVEN STRETCH OF HISTORY, THERE ARE CERTAIN MORALS ESPOUSED BY THE LOUDEST OR MOST NUMEROUS.

...YOU'RE OVERLOOKING THE FACT THAT THERE'S NO ABSOLUTE STANDARD WHEN IT COMES TO BELIEF. WE CAN'T LINE IDEALS UP IN ORDER FROM BEST TO WORST.

NOT TO MENTION...

ULTIMATELY, ANY ATTEMPT TO GROUP AND GENERALIZE OTHERS...

...IS MATERIALLY NO DIFFERENT FROM THE GRAVEST MISTAKES OF OUR PAST.

...EVEN IF UNDERTAKEN WITH SOME NOBLER END GOAL IN MIND...

JUST AS THE KADOE ONCE THOUGHT TO SEE THEIR FAITH ECLIPSE ALL OTHERS...

...AND THE ADHERENTS OF ASIN SOUGHT TO ERADICATE THE HAUPI.

ALL THE SAME, PEOPLE HAVE A DISTURBING TENDENCY TO CLING TO THEM, MISTAKING THEIR MORALS FOR TRUTHS AND STANDARDS OF JUSTICE.

AND, MORE DISTRESSING YET, THERE ARE SOME IN EVERY ERA WHO SEEK TO WIELD THE CURRENT FLAVOR OF JUSTICE AS A WEAPON TO COMPEL CHANGE IN OTHERS.

BUT IF WHAT YOU SAY IS TRUE...

...DOES THAT MEAN ANY-BODY *UNABLE* TO ADAPT IS DOOMED TO ISOLATION?

THE SUN RISES, AND THE SUN SETS.

WALK 100 LEAGUES AND THE IDEAS IN VOGUE WILL BE COMPLETELY DIFFERENT.

STANDING AT THE FRINGE AND DECRYING THE NATURAL EBB AND FLOW OF HUMAN BEHAVIOR WILL ONLY WEAR YOU DOWN IN BODY AND MIND.

...IS THAT WE NEED ONLY BE WILLING TO MEET HALFWAY.

MY OWN STANCE ON THE MATTER...

DO YOU REALLY THINK THOSE THREE CAN MANAGE IT?

IT SOUNDS EASIER SAID THAN DONE.

...IF THE FIRST CAN SHIFT HALF OF HIS OWN BELIEFS ASIDE AND ACCEPT HALF OF WHAT HE SEES, AND THE OTHER CAN DO THE SAME, THEY'LL FIND IT'S SUFFICIENT TO COEXIST.

WHEN TWO MINDS WITH CONFLICTING VIEWS COLLIDE...

OH, THEY MOST CERTAINLY CAN.

A HALF-STEP NEARER FROM EACH. THAT'S ALL IT TAKES.

IF THEY CAN FIND THAT MODICUM OF MUTUAL REGARD...

...YOU CAN BE QUITE SURE THEY WILL GET PAST THIS.

THEY NEEDN'T THINK THEMSELVES THE SAME.

ALL THAT'S REQUIRED IS THE WILLINGNESS TO MAINTAIN A SURFACE UNDERSTANDING.

THAT SAID, AS TEACHERS AND KAFNA, YOU ARE RIGHT TO BE CAUTIOUS.

...BUT WE WILL NOT INTERFERE.

NOT YET.

WE WILL CONTINUE TO MONITOR THE SITUATION...

KEEP A CLOSE EYE ON ALL OUR YOUNG CHARGES AS THEY STRUGGLE THROUGH THIS, AND BE READY TO LEND AN EAR WHENEVER NEED ARISES.

IS THAT UNDERSTOOD?

YES, MA'AM !!











...BECAUSE OF MY FATHER'S SWAY. THAT'S HOW I BECAME A KAFNA.

I'M ONLY HERE...

SEATS, PLEASE.

SHE'S BEEN ABSENT ALL DAY.

WHERE IS MISS HAHAL'K?

RETURN TO YOUR SEAT, MISS OHGGA.

RUB

RUB

HMPH!

NOT A CHANCE.

I'D LIKE TO SIT HERE FOR TODAY'S TEST, MA'AM.

SHALL I GO FETCH HER?

I CHECKED IN ON HER IN THE AFTER-NOON. SHE WAS STILL IN BED.

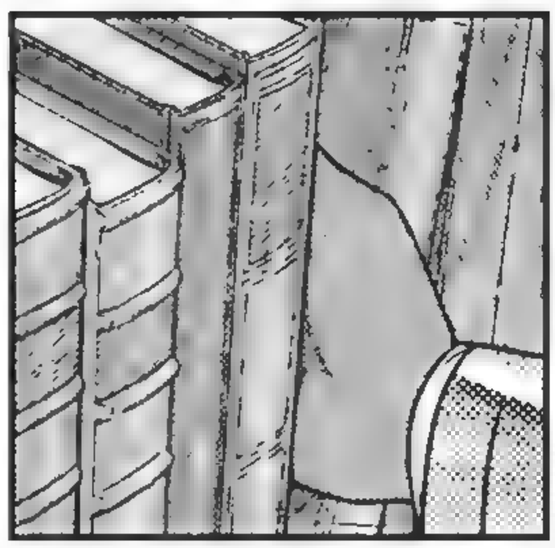
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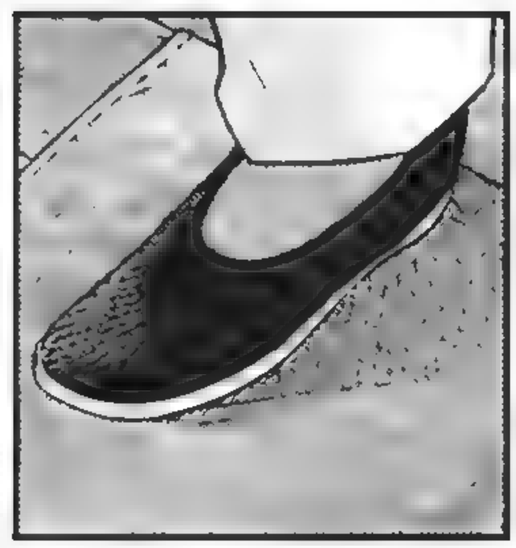
THAT WON'T BE NECES-SARY.

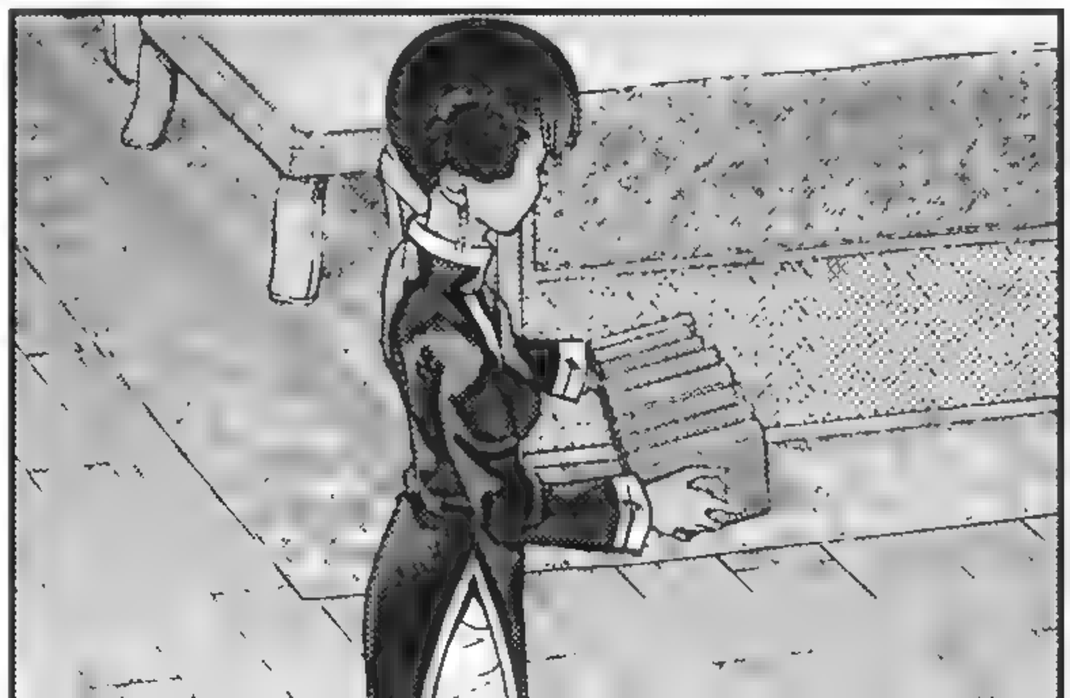












AM I A HELPLESS CHICK...

...HERE TO WARBLE AND SQUAWK FOR YOUR AMUSEMENT?

...THAN ENDURE ANOTHER MOMENT OF THEIR SICKLY SWEET SMILES.

I'D RATHER TAKE THAT KICK TO THE FACE...

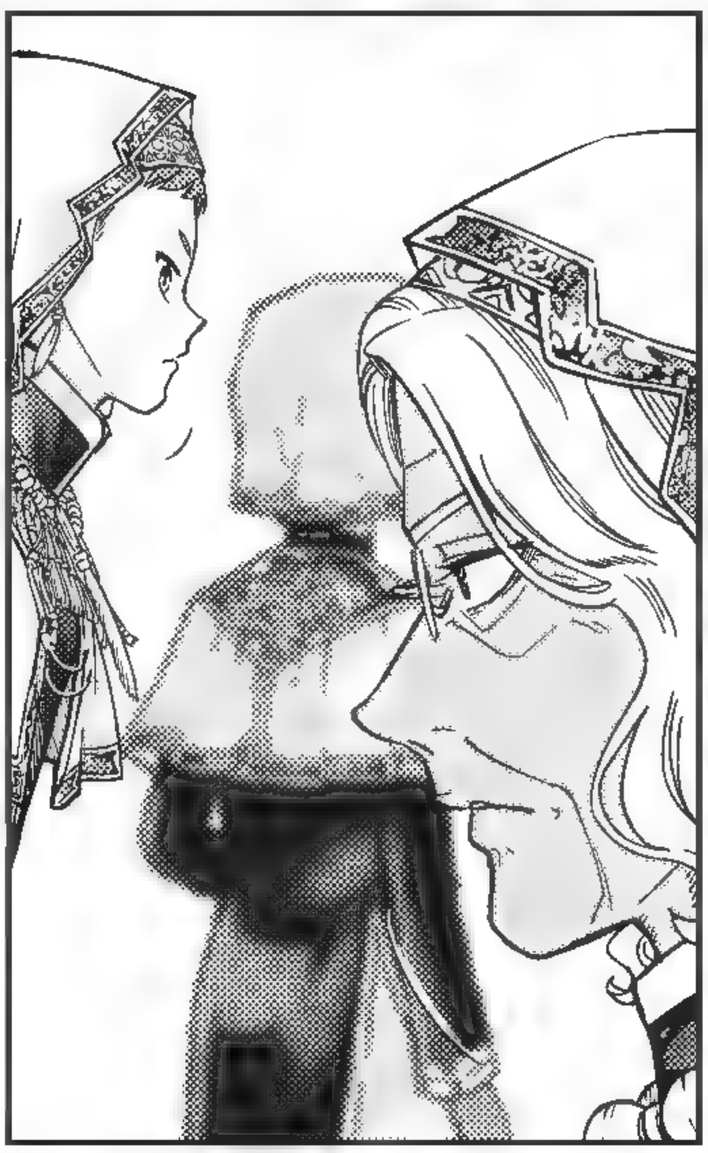
QUIT TREATING ME LIKE A JOKE...!

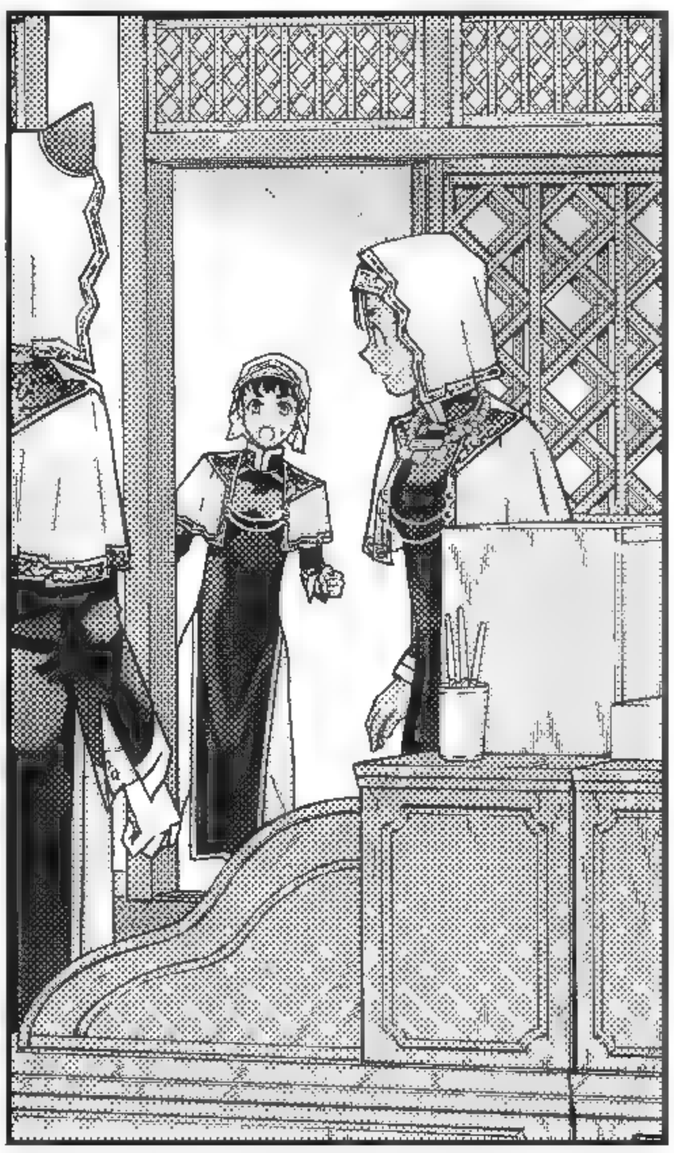
I DON'T WANT YOUR PITY, NO MATTER HOW PATHETIC I TRULY AM.

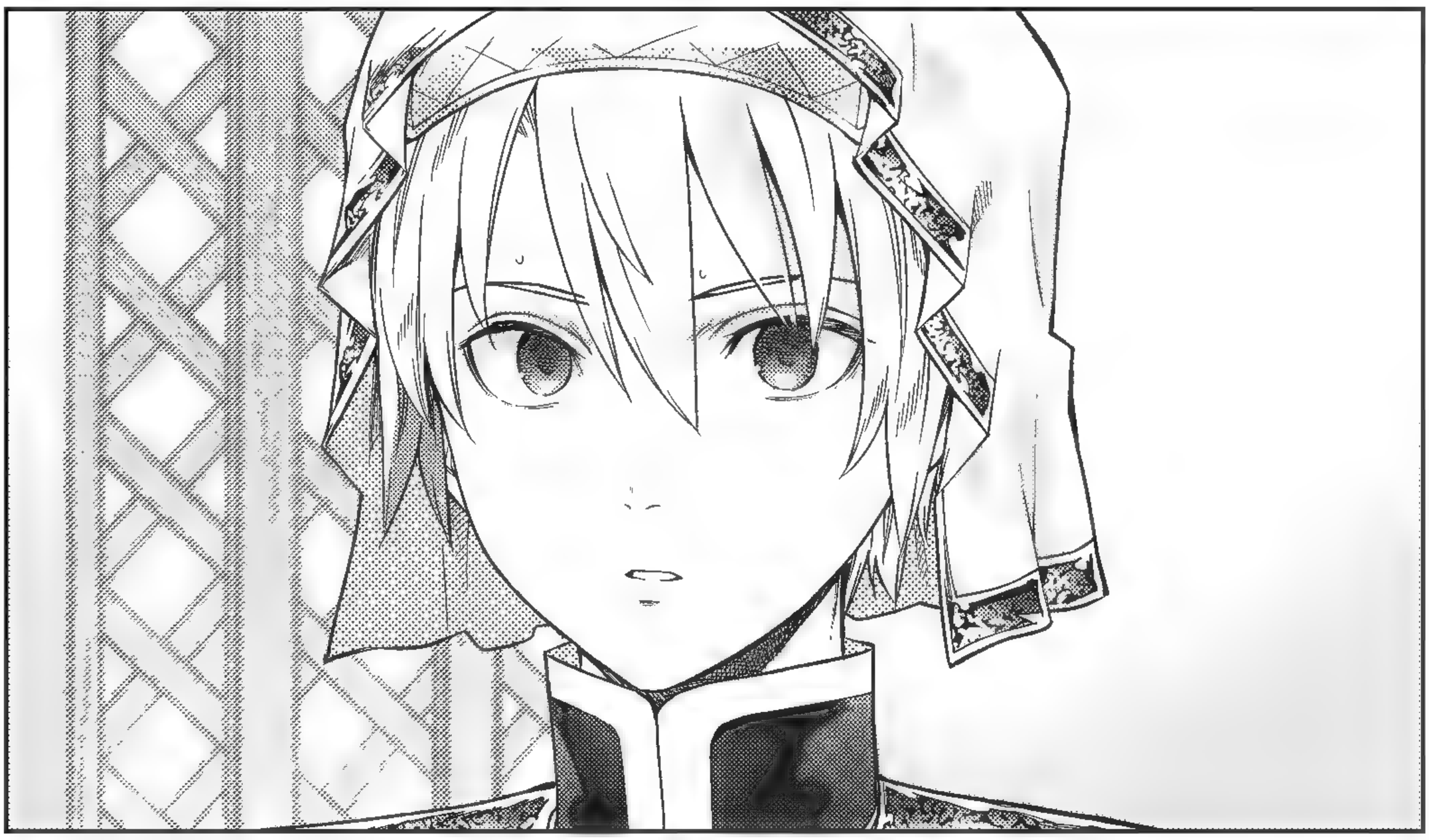












DO YOU THINK MISS HAHAL'K COULD HAVE DONE THIS?

WH-WHAT HAP-PENED ?!

HOW *AWFUL* ...

...!

WHO ELSE WOULD PULL A CRUMMY STUNT LIKE THIS?!

WE SHOULDN'T JUMP TO CONCLU-SIONS. WE DON'T KNOW IT WAS HER.

SHE CAN RUN, BUT SHE CAN'T HIDE!

SHE'S NOT IN HER ROOM!

THEO?!

UWSH

MURMUR

MURMUR

MURMUR

YANK

FWAP

WAIT! I CAN FEEL SOME-THING!

AND IT'S... *ABOVE* US?

HEY! MEDINA! EVERY-ONE'S LOOKING FOR–

WHY DID YOU DO IT?

YOU'RE *QUITTING* ...?

THINK OF IT AS A LITTLE GOING-AWAY PRESENT.

I'M DONE WITH THIS KAFNA STUFF.

I DON'T CARE ABOUT HAVING A JOB.

IT'S NOT LIKE I EVER HAD A THING FOR BOOKS.

I JUST WANTED TO SHOW THEM UP.

I WANTED TO BURN IT INTO EVERY ONE OF THOSE JERKS' HEADS...

...THAT I'M MORE OF A HAHAL'K THAN THEY'LL EVER BE.

WHO EXACTLY ARE YOU CALL-ING...

...JERKS?

MY FATHER IS A JERK.

MY MOTHER IS A JERK.

AND ALL OF MY SIB-LINGS.

AND THE SERVING WOMEN, TOO.

I PAID MY DUES TO BEAR THE HAHAL'K NAME.

I PUT UP WITH ALL OF IT.

SO THE LEAST YOU *PEASANTS* COULD DO IS THROW YOUR-SELVES AT MY FEET!

WHAT ELSE DO I GET OUT OF THIS STUPID NAME?

'CAUSE IF YOU *DON'T* BOW TO ME, WHAT'S THE POINT?

...NEARLY EVERY CUSTOM AND VALUE I'VE TAKEN FOR GRANTED HAS BEEN TURNED ON ITS HEAD.

SINCE THE DAY I LEFT MY VILLAGE...

...

I'M NOT GONNA PRETEND IT'S EASY. SOMETIMES THE THINGS THAT ARE COMMON SENSE FOR SOMEBODY ELSE ARE DIFFICULT FOR ME TO AGREE WITH OR EVEN ACCEPT.

...FROM ALL OVER THE CONTINENT, AND THEY'VE ALL GOT THEIR OWN IDEAS ABOUT WHAT'S NORMAL AND WHAT'S NOT.

AFTZAAK'S FULL OF SO MANY PEOPLE...

...BETWEEN THE EFFORTS I SHOULD MAKE TO ADAPT, AND THE PARTS OF MYSELF I'M NOT WILLING TO GIVE UP.

...TO DRAW THE RIGHT LINE...

...I'LL HAVE THE CONFIDENCE AND EXPERI-ENCE...

BUT I'VE GOT FAITH THAT SOMEDAY...

I TOLD YOU, I'M OUT. SO CONGRATS. I BET YOU'RE ALL THRILLED TO HEAR IT.

GOOD FOR YOU.

NOT THAT I CARE.

THE LIBRARY... THE *KAFNA* NEED EVERY PAIR OF HANDS WE CAN GET. YOU'RE A VALUED COMPANION IN OUR FIGHT TO PROTECT THE BOOKS.

IF YOU TRULY DO INTEND TO QUIT, KNOW THAT I'LL DO EVERYTHING IN MY POWER TO STOP YOU.

OH YEAH?

I'M GONNA JOIN FORCES WITH THE LITTLE BLOND BOY WHO REEKS OF THE COUNTRYSIDE, AM I?

...THAT EVENTUALLY THE TWO OF US WILL FIND A WAY TO JOIN HANDS AND WORK TOGETHER.

AND I *STILL* BELIEVE...

I *DESERVE* TO BE IN CHARGE! IT'S MY *BIRTH-RIGHT!*

HONESTLY, YOU AND THE REST OF THOSE FOOLS SHOULD BE REPORTING TO ME!

YOU AND I ARE CLASS-MATES! NOTHING MORE!

...EXCUSE ME?

AFTER ALL, I TOO TRACE BACK TO A NOBLE HOUSE THAT HONORS THE AKINI TRADITION.

IF LINE-AGE IS YOUR ONLY BASIS FOR ACQUAINTANCE, THEN YOU AND I SHOULD GET ALONG QUITE WELL.

...OF A VERY PARTICULAR SOCIAL STRATUM. GIVEN YOUR OWN BACKGROUND, I ASSUME YOU'VE AT LEAST HEARD OF IT.

NOT MANY FOLLOWERS OF ASIN ARE FAMILIAR WITH THIS CUSTOM TODAY. I'M TOLD IT HAS NEARLY DIED OUT. BUT THOSE WHO *DO* STILL PRACTICE IT ARE THE AKINI...

YOU, THE LITTLE VILLAGE BOY, AN AKINI OF NOBLE BIRTH?

CONGRATS AGAIN. IT'S SUCH A DES-PERATE LIE, IT ALMOST MAKES ME FEEL *BAD* FOR YOU.

THE MARK OF THE DRUUJ ...!

IT'S NOT HARD TO IMAGINE WHAT WAS DISRUPTIVE ABOUT *MY* BIRTH, AND WHY I THUS BEAR THE SCAR.

UNIONS OF UNEQUAL STANDING, BIRTHS OUT OF WEDLOCK, YOUNGER TWINS... AS INFANTS, THEIR FOREHEADS ARE MARKED, AND THEY'RE LEFT IN THE WILDERNESS TO RETURN TO GOD.

IF YOU KNOW THE NAME, THEN YOU KNOW WHAT IT SIGNIFIES. A CHILD WHOSE EXISTENCE IS DEEMED INCONVENIENT.

STOP.

PFF...

A HA HA ...!

SHE RAISED ME. THE FACT THAT I SURVIVED AND STAND HERE TODAY, I OWE ENTIRELY TO HER.

I WAS NEVER TOLD THE DETAILS. I ONLY KNOW THAT AFTER I WAS LEFT TO DIE, A YOUNG WOMAN FOUND ME AND PICKED ME UP.

HOW ARE YOU STILL *ALIVE?*

BUT... HOW...?

WHAT A FOOL SHE MUST BE.

BUT I GUESS YOU MUST FEEL PRETTY LUCKY THAT SOMEONE *STUPID* AND *IGNORANT* ENOUGH SHOWED UP IN TIME TO–

DON'T DO THIS.

EVERYONE KNOWS NOT TO GO NEAR A BABY BEARING THE MARK OF THE DRUUJ. IF YOU TOUCH THE CHILD, YOU SHARE ITS CURSE!

AS A RESPECTED FELLOW TRAINEE AND FUTURE COLLEAGUE, YOU DESERVE SPECIAL CONSIDERATION. BUT I'D ASK THAT YOU PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO WHAT I SAY NEXT.

SHIK

J

... HUH?

I WILL NOT STAND TO HAVE *ANYONE* SPEAK ILL OF MY DEAR SISTER.

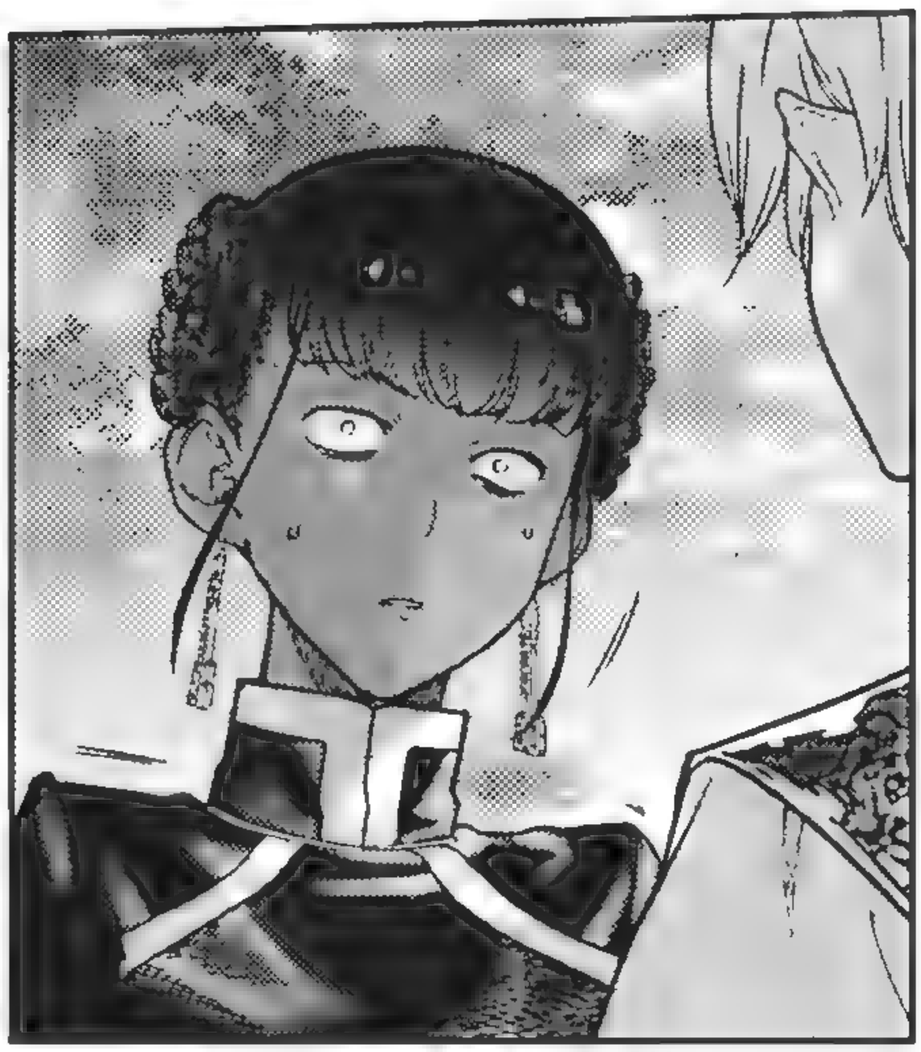
YOU'VE ALREADY INSULTED HER TWICE.

COUNT YOURSELF LUCKY TO GET OFF WITH A WARNING TODAY.

BECAUSE THE NEXT TIME, I'LL BE RE-SOLVING THIS WITH *FISTS*...

...AND THE FIRST ONE'S FLYING STRAIGHT FOR YOUR FACE.





...HOW ABOUT SHOWING SOME RESPECT AND DEVOTION TO YOUR FAMILY MEMBERS INSTEAD OF CURSING THEM BEHIND THEIR BACKS?

SO IF YOU'RE STILL GOING ON ABOUT HOW MUCH IT MEANS TO YOU...

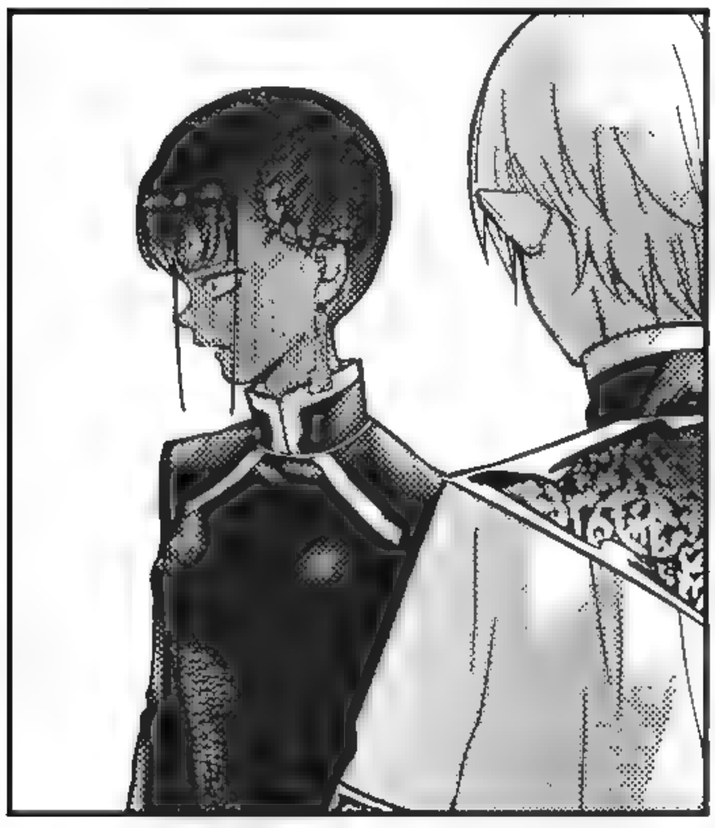
THAT NOBLE BLOOD YOU CLAIM TO CARE ABOUT, YOU GOT FROM YOUR *PARENTS*.

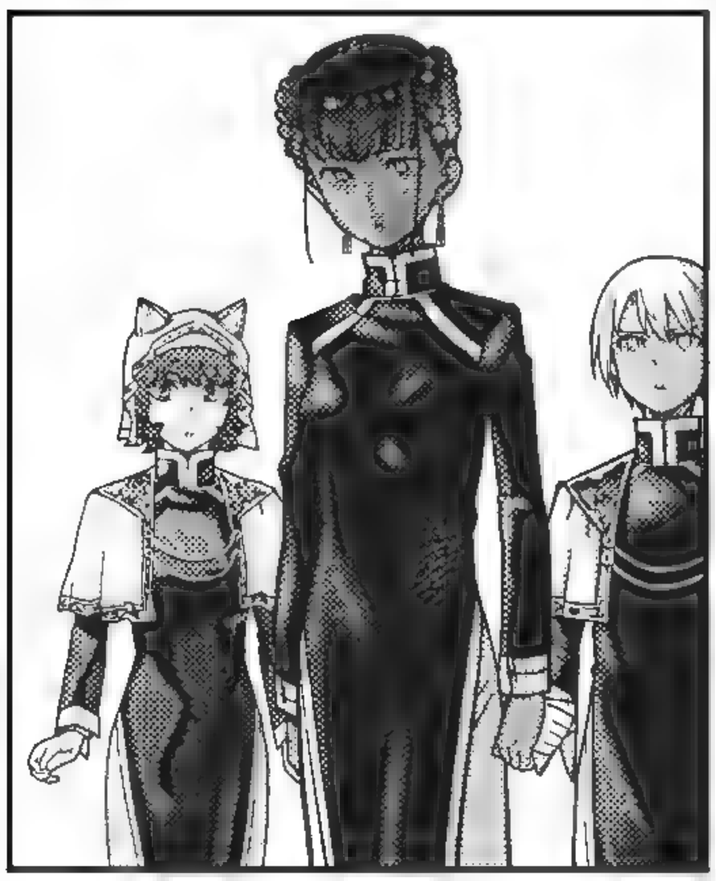
AND IF YOU *DO* DESPISE YOUR PAR-ENTS...

...SHOULDN'T YOU WANT MORE?

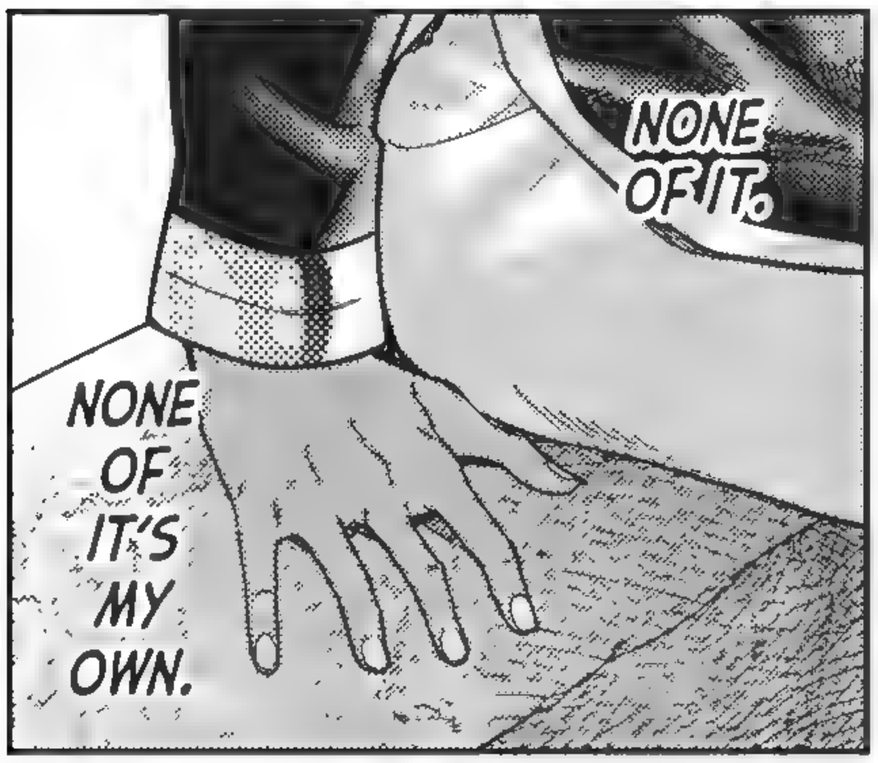
SHOULDN'T YOU PRIDE YOUR-SELF...

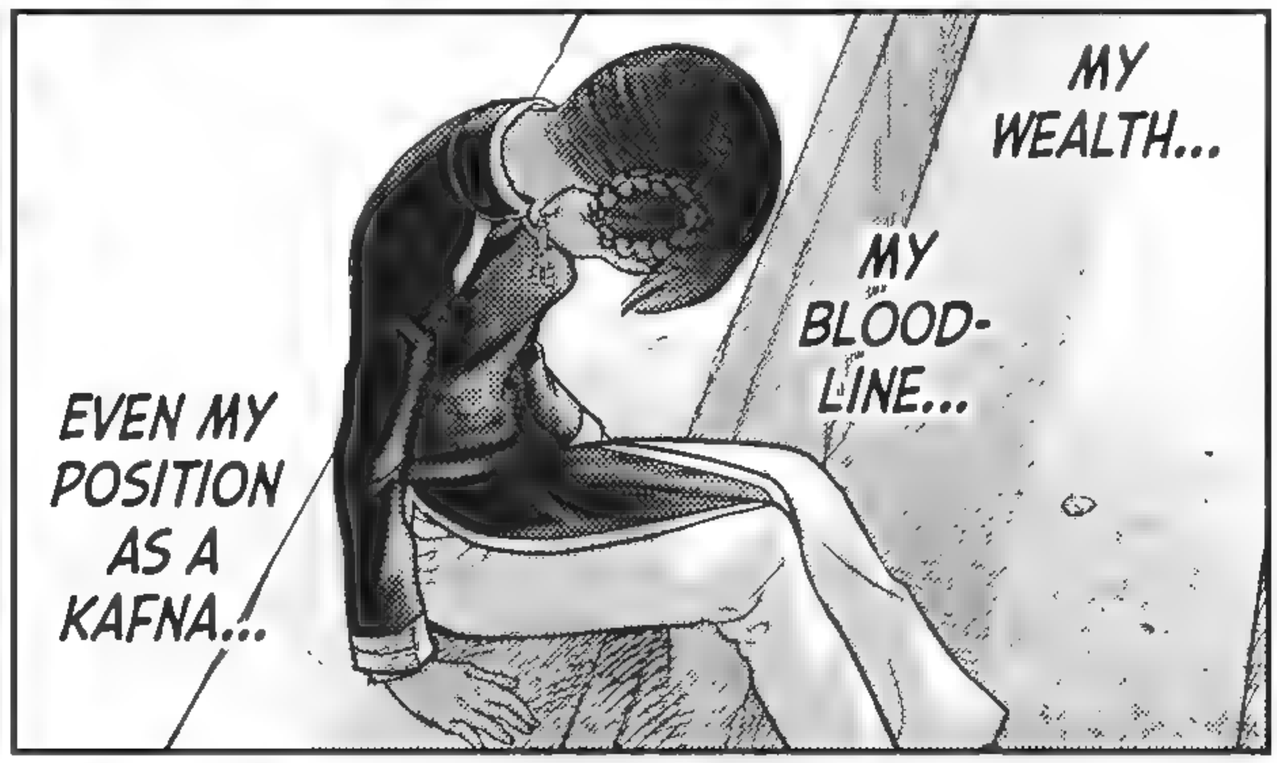
...NOT ON THE THINGS THEY GAVE YOU, BUT THE THINGS YOU'VE MADE FOR YOUR-SELF?!








NONE OF IT.
NONE OF IT'S MY OWN.


MY WEALTH...
MY BLOOD-LINE...
EVEN MY POSITION AS A KAFNA...


WHAT'S THE ANSWER? WHAT DO I DO?


I DON'T HAVE ANYTHING I'VE MADE FOR MY-SELF.

YOU FIND YOUR WAY TO CONTRIBUTE!

THERE ARE PLACES WHERE BIRTH DESERVES HONOR!

THERE ARE PLACES WHERE FAITH BEGETS RESPECT!

THE LIBRARY IS NEITHER!

IF THERE'S ANY TIME A KAFNA BOWS TO ANOTHER KAFNA, IT'S NOT BECAUSE OF BIRTH OR STATUS.

KAFNA BOW TO THOSE WHO EXCEL IN THEIR WORK.

THEY SAVE THEIR REGARD FOR THE INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE SO OVERWHELMINGLY CAPABLE WHEN OBSERVED UP CLOSE, IT BOGGLES THE MIND.

...IS ONE THAT ONLY YOU CAN MAKE.

AND THE CHOICE OF WHERE YOU WISH TO SPEND YOUR DAYS...

...AND THE ACHIEVEMENTS NOBODY ELSE COULD HOPE TO REPLI-CATE.

I'LL SHOW YOU ALL THE WORK THAT ONLY I CAN DO...

I'LL STAY RIGHT HERE.

ALL RIGHT. I'LL PLAY.

AND YOU BETTER BELIEVE I'LL SUCCEED...

...'CAUSE I'LL TELL YOU RIGHT NOW...

...THERE'S NO ENTRY FOR "IMPOSSIBLE" IN MY *PERSONAL* DICTIONARY!

AS OF RIGHT NOW, WE'RE TURNING THE TABLES.

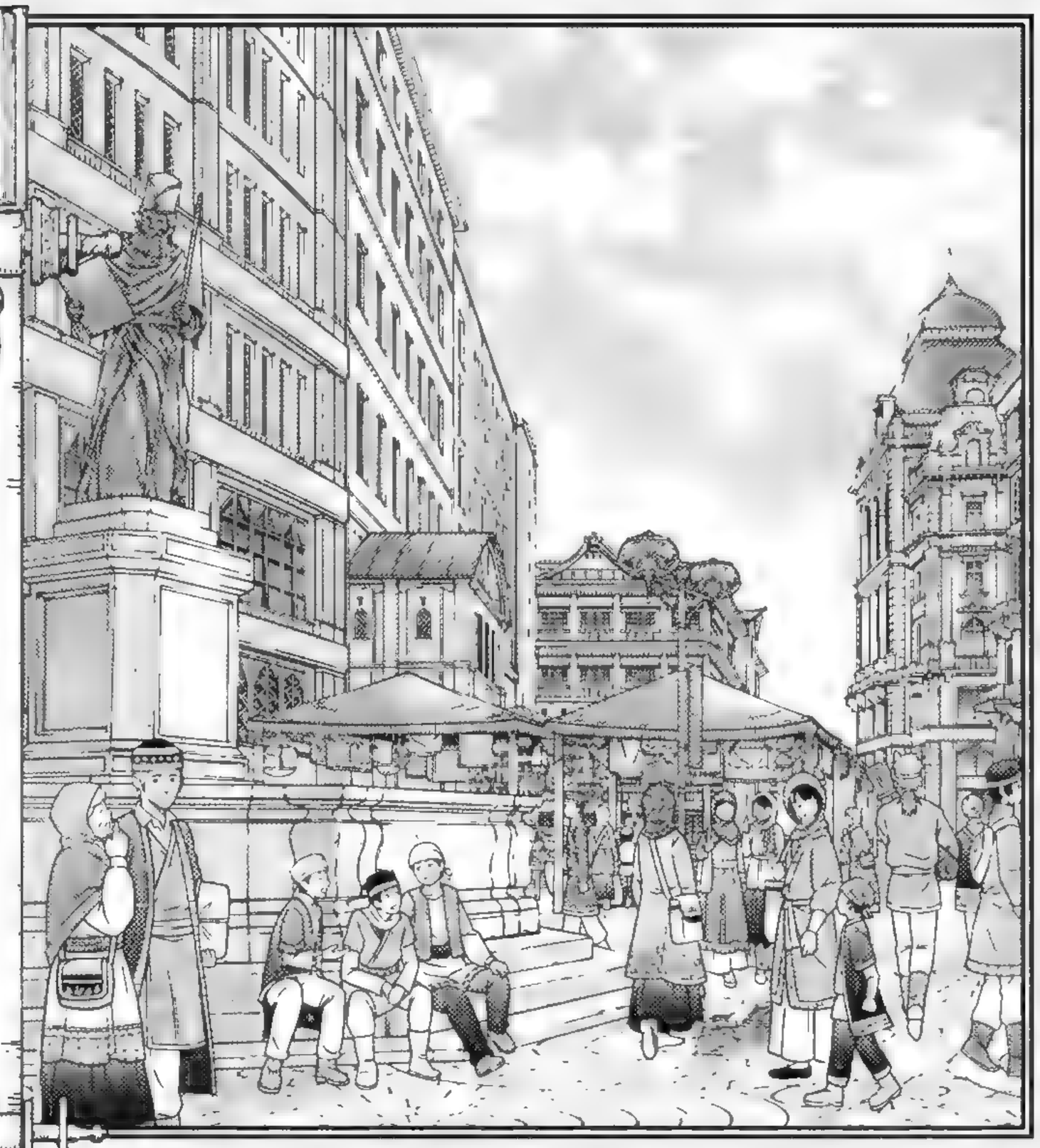
LET'S SHOW THEM WHAT WE'VE GOT.

XOCHITOL HOZANYK

AFTZAAK'S PRIMARY COMMERCIAL AND ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICT, EXTENDING EASTWARD OFF CITLAL BOULEVARD, THE MAJOR ROADWAY THAT EXTENDS SOUTH FROM MAM RA ZATT. XOCHITOL HOZANYK, OR "THE SOUTHERN FLOWER," IS SAID TO BE THE LIVELIEST PLACE ON THE CONTINENT AND A MUST-SEE DESTINATION FOR EVERY VISITOR TO AFTZAAK. ITS COURTYARD FEATURES A STATUE OF THE GUIDING SCHOLAR, DESTROYED SOME TIME AGO DURING THE SUDDEN, UNEXPLAINED APPEARANCE OF A SYNTHSPIRIT WITHIN THE CITY LIMITS, BUT QUICKLY REPLACED FOLLOWING THE INCIDENT.

"The darkness will recede, if only the sun rises again."

—Komako Kaulikk





PACHARURAC

A COVERED MARKET WHOSE NAME TRANSLATES TO "ARTISANS OF EVERY ITEM KNOWN TO MAN." ORIGINALLY BUILT BY DECREE OF HIS MAJESTY KING CUPUL, THE MARKET BOASTS STALLS REPRESENTING EVERY HOUSEHOLD GOOD AND TRADE ON OFFER IN THE CITY, INCLUDING FOODSTUFFS, CLOTHING, RUGS, IRONWARE, CERAMICS, AND MORE. BUT PACHARURAC'S ROLE IN THE CITY EXTENDS BEYOND TRADE, WITH JEWELERS, BOOKSTORES, BATHHOUSES, SMALL THEATERS, AND EVEN HALLS OF WORSHIP FOR EACH MAJOR RELIGION ALL HOUSED UNDER ITS LEAGUES AND LEAGUES OF ROOFED CORRIDORS.

"Work as feverishly as you like, it's still full of luxuries you'll never afford."

—Nessar Mahcustah



AFTZAANKA PALACE

THE CURRENT RESIDENCE OF THE ROYAL HOUSE OF CUPUL (ONCE KNOWN AS "KOORA"), FORMER MONARCHS OF AFTZAAK. THOUGH THE FAMILY NO LONGER EXERTS DIRECT CONTROL OVER THE CITY, IT CONTINUES TO PLAY AN INFLUENTIAL ROLE IN MODERN POLITICS, WITH MEMBERS FILLING NUMEROUS SEATS IN THE CITY COUNCIL AND EVEN SUCH PROMINENT ROLES AS CITY COUNCIL CHAIRMAN AND STEWARD OF THE GENERAL AFFAIRS OFFICE OF THE CENTRAL LIBRARY. THE STATUE PICTURED TO THE LEFT IS FOUND AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE AFTZAANKA PALACE GARDENS; IT DEPICTS HIS MAJESTY ZEIJA CUPUL, FIRST MONARCH OF HOUSE CUPUL, TAMING A WILD TUSKHORN STALLION WITH HIS BARE HANDS.

"A crown of virtue shines infinitely brighter than one of gold."

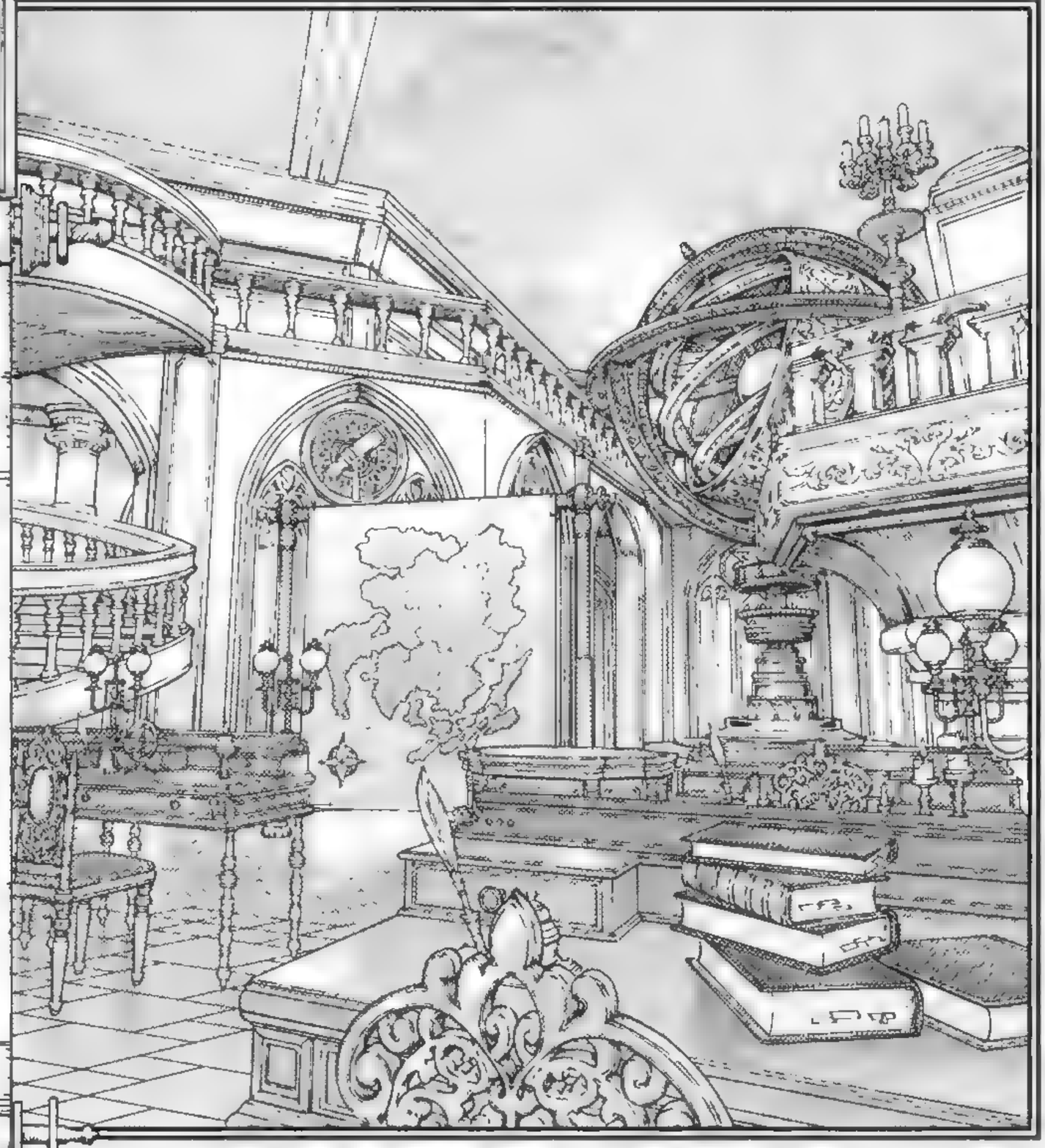
—Zeija Cupul

TOHNE INSTITUTE, SECOND CAMPUS

AFTZAAK'S MOST DISTINGUISHED INSTITUTE AND HOST TO ALL THE CITY'S PREEMINENT SCHOLARS. THE TOHNE IS OFFICIALLY HEADQUARTERED AT THE RAKTA UNIVERSITY OF THE SAME NAME; THIS OFFSHOOT WAS ORIGINALLY ESTABLISHED AS A CENTRAL LIBRARY-ADJACENT LOCATION FOR USE BY ITS RESEARCHERS. SINCE THAT TIME, THE SECOND CAMPUS HAS GROWN TO BECOME THE PREFERRED RESEARCH SITE FOR MANY OF THE MOST WELL-KNOWN AND RESPECTED MINDS ON THE CONTINENT.

"Ignorance precludes insight."

—Zarud Voynix



27 The Dawn Will Break

MAYBE SOMETHING'S TROUBLING MISS HAHAL'K. MAYBE THAT'S WHY SHE DID IT.

MAYBE ...

THAT DOESN'T EXCUSE IT.

...

WE DIDN'T DO IT.

MAYBE WE SHOULD HELP CLEAN UP?

WHAT DO I TELL PROFES-SOR XTOH ...?

Huh? What is all this?

Where's Tnea?

SHE SHOULD KNOW THERE ARE CERTAIN THINGS YOU JUST *NEVER* DO.

WE HAVE TO GO IN THERE. IT NEEDS TO BE DONE.

BUT I'LL HELP EXPLAIN, ALL RIGHT?

MURMUR

HII

VRSH

STORM

MISS MIHONA!

WAIT! WE CAN-

THE PEOPLE WHO WROTE THE PROSE...

THE PEOPLE WHO MADE THE PAPER...

STORM

STORM

THE PEOPLE WHO EDITED THE TEXT...

THE PEOPLE WHO LAID THE TYPE...

STORM

THE PEOPLE WHO BOUND THE BOOK...

THE PEOPLE WHO CARRIED IT...

THE PEOPLE WHO SOLD IT...

I'M VERY SORRY FOR WHAT I'VE DONE.

DO YOU THINK YOU'RE BETTER THAN ALL OF THEM?! DOES THEIR WORK MEAN NOTHING TO YOU?!

I'LL CLEAN EVERY-THING UP.

FWOING

USE IT TO HELP PICK UP?

WELL, I'VE RAISED MY FIST. WHAT AM I SUP-POSED TO DO WITH IT NOW?

FWAP FWAP

NZZL NZZL

...

What exactly happened here, anyway?

GOOD IDEA.

CLAP

ANY DAMAGED BOOKS, BRING THEM TO ME, PLEASE!

ALL RIGHT, GUYS! LET'S ALL PITCH IN AND GET THIS PLACE BACK TO NORMAL!

BUSTLE BUSTLE

CHATTER CHATTER

BUSTLE

BUSTLE

I THOUGHT FOR SURE YOU'D GIVEN UP.

HM?

WHAT'S THE DEAL?

YOU STILL THINK YOU'VE GOT WHAT IT TAKES...

...TO BE A KAFNA?

SHE IS *NOT* GIVING UP.

AND SHE WON'T BE DRAGGING *YOU* OR *ANY* OF US DOWN.

MISS MEDINA HAS A MARK TO LEAVE ON THE LIBRARY THAT ONLY SHE CAN MAKE. JUST YOU WAIT AND SEE.

HMPH. IF SHE'S GOT IT IN HER TO TRY, THEN BY ALL MEANS.

I'LL EVEN LEAD THE CHEER.

LADY FOREHEAD WISHES TO SEE YOU.

HEY. BLONDIE.

...DO YOU RECALL, DURING THE PRACTICAL COMPONENT, WHEN I BROUGHT UP THE MATTER OF THE DIVERSITY QUOTA?

WAIT. THAT'S ALV'S NICK-NAME FOR HER?!

TELL ME...

THEO FUMIS. GOOD EVENING.

YOU REGISTERED AS A HYRON. SO FOR YOU, AT LEAST, THERE WAS NO PREF-ERENTIAL TREAT-MENT.

WHAT I MEAN TO SAY IS... YOU PASSED THE KAFNA EXAM FAIR AND SQUARE. WRIT-TEN PORTION INCLUDED.

JUST TO BE SURE, I LOOKED INTO IT AFTER THE EXAM... AND IT SEEMS I WAS MISTAKEN.

*"TO ENSURE THE RANKS OF THE KAFNA AREN'T POPULATED EN-TIRELY BY HYRON, THE EXAM HAS A DIVERSITY QUOTA. THOSE HAILING FROM OTHER RACES ARE TREATED WITH EXCEPTIONAL **LENIENCE** DURING THE PRELIMINARY GRADING."*

...I SEE. IT HAD OCCURRED TO ME THAT YOUR CURRENT STRUGGLE MIGHT BE DUE TO SOME NAG-GING MISCON-CEPTION THAT YOU DON'T BELONG.

NOPE!

NOTHIN' TO BLAME BUT GARDEN-VARIETY LACK OF ABILITY!

So I came here to clear things up. Just in case.

ACTUALLY, I'VE BEEN SO FOCUSED ON KEEPING MY HEAD ABOVE WATER, I'D FORGOTTEN ALL ABOUT THAT.

OH...

UM... UH...

...I THINK YOU COULD HELP US OUT.

...AND IF YOU WOULDN'T MIND...

I'VE GOT A FEW TRICKS THAT MIGHT HELP US GET INTO THE RIGHT ONE...

STILL, YOU STOPPED BY AT THE PERFECT TIME!

I'M STARTING TO SEE THAT *MINDSET* IS GONNA PLAY A BIG PART IN DRAWING OUT MY POTENTIAL—AND THAT OF OHGGA AND MEDINA, TOO.

?

WHAT IN THE MAGUS'S NAME IS GOING ON?

STARTING TODAY, THE THREE OF US WILL BE ATTENDING LECTURES IN THE FRONT ROW.

WE ASKED AROUND, AND OUR CLASS-MATES WERE KIND ENOUGH TO SWAP SEATS WITH US!

Hi, there!

I didn't realize I'd be sitting in the *back*.

I'LL BE HONEST WITH YOU. RIGHT NOW, I'M *TERRIFIED.*

I KNOW THE TESTS AREN'T A GROUP EFFORT...

...BUT...

...I WORRY THAT IF I DON'T FIND A WAY TO STOP *FEELING* LIKE I'M ALONE, I'LL NEVER OVERCOME MY TERROR.

AND THIS...

THIS IS SUPPOSED TO BE OUR NEW NORMAL. THIS IS THE LEVEL WE HAVE TO OPERATE AT.

EVERY KAFNA I MEET SEEMS SO FAR ABOVE ME.

THE PROBLEMS ON OUR TESTS ARE DEMANDING MORE THAN I'VE EVER KNOWN HOW TO GIVE.

I'VE GOT AN IDEA!

HOLD OUT YOUR HANDS!

SO THIS IS WHAT I CAME UP WITH.

I SAY THE THREE OF US BAND AS ONE...

...AND WE MAKE IT PAST THIS HURDLE *TOGETHER.*

...I'D SAY WE'RE AT ABOUT A *THREE* RIGHT NOW.

ASSUM-ING WE'RE GONNA SAVE *FIVE* FINGERS FOR WHEN WE ALL PASS THE TEST...

THE CREYAK HOLD UP FINGERS TO SHOW HOW THEY'RE FEELIN' ABOUT STUFF. THE MORE FINGERS, THE MORE FIRED UP YOU ARE!

C'MON, MEDINA! JOIN IN!

OOH! I LIKE IT!

AND WHEN YOU'RE WITH SOMEBODY ELSE, YOU PRESS THOSE FINGERS TOGETHER TO SHARE THE SENTI-MENT!

FWAP

CLATTER

AND FINALLY, WE'LL END WITH TODAY'S TEST.

FWIP

FWIP

YOUR TIME STARTS...

...NOW!

FWIP

I PROMISED TIFA. I TOLD HER I'D MAKE HER PROUD AS A KAFNA.

I HAVE TO WANT TO BE THE BEST! THE GREATEST KAFNA!

...THEN I HAVE TO WANT MORE.

I CAN'T SETTLE WITH JUST MAKING HER PROUD.

AND IF PROFES-SOR XTOH IS RIGHT...

...AND MY BRAIN NEEDS SOMETHING BIGGER TO KEEP ME RUNNING STRONG...

VRSH

FORGET IT! I CAN FIGURE THAT OUT LATER!

GREATEST KAFNA? WHAT DOES THAT EVEN MEAN?

GRAAAH!

TIME!

DANG IT ALL!

PENS DOWN!

NEXT TIME!

BRM
BRM
BRM
BRM

IT'S USELESS.

THERE'S NO WAY I'LL FINISH IN TIME.

SKRT

SKRT

SKRT

SKRT

SKRT

ガタン CLATTER

ガタン CLATTER

CLATTER ガタン

...YOU'LL BE THAT MUCH STRONGER TOMOR-ROW!

POUR EVERY-THING YOU HAVE INTO IT TODAY!

IF YOU STILL DON'T FINISH...

DON'T GIVE UP!

ZA-SH

HFF...

HFF...

CLATTER

KTNK

MISTER FUMIS!

FWUMP

YOUR PENMANSHIP IS ATROCIOUS. I CAN'T READ A THING.

SNRXXX


RM
MB

SKRT

SKRT

SKRT

GOOD!

THIS WILL DO!

THIS WILL DO!

GRAH!

CURSE THEM ALL. CURSE EVERY LAST ONE OF THEM!

GUESS WHAT, OLD MAN? I THINK SO, TOO!

...WHO THINKS ONE FAILED TEST IS TOO GREAT AN EMBARRASSMENT FOR HIS FAMILY NAME TO BEAR.

CURSE THE STUPID, MEDDLING OLD FOOL...

CURSE THESE REVOLTING HALF-BREEDS WHO SIT AT MY SIDE.

AND CURSE THESE CLASSMATES WHO GLARE AT ME WITH EYES LIKE MY SIBLINGS.

I WAS BORN A HAHAL'K, AND I WAS RAISED AS ONE, TOO.

I CANNOT– I WILL NOT– CHANGE WHO I AM.

...WHAT SETS ME APART.

YOU'LL KNOW SOON ENOUGH...

JUST YOU WAIT.

...OVER THE POWER...

...OF MEDINA HAHAL'K!

BY THE TIME THIS IS OVER, I'LL HAVE EVERY ONE OF YOU INSOLENT JERKS GAPING IN AWE...

WHAM

GOOD! THIS WILL DO!



TWIRL
クルッ

WELL DONE, YOU THREE!

FWAMP

WOOHOO!!

CLAP CLAP CLAP

ALL RIGHT. ENOUGH WITH THE CELEBRAT-ING.

IF HE CAN GET THE TESTS DOWN PAT, HE'S GONNA BE A SERIOUS CONTENDER.

MAYBE. BUT THEO'S PRACTICAL SCORES HAVE GOTTA BE *AMAZING*.

OH! MY! GOSH!

HEH.

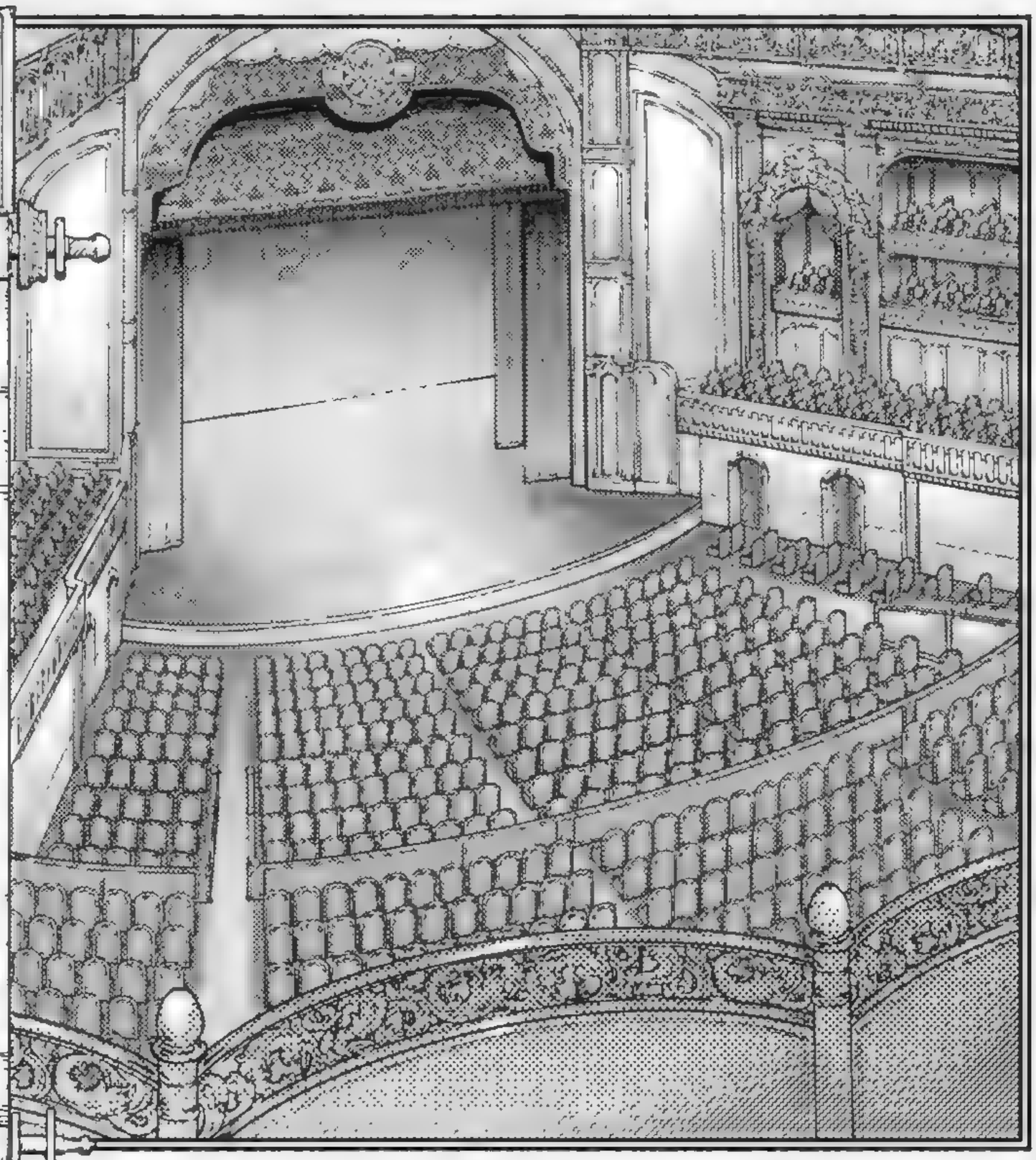
LOTTA FANFARE FOR FINALLY MANAGING THE BARE MINIMUM.

And they've still only done it one time!

C'MON, *THEO.*

LET'S GO EAT.

CHUWEN PLAYHOUSE

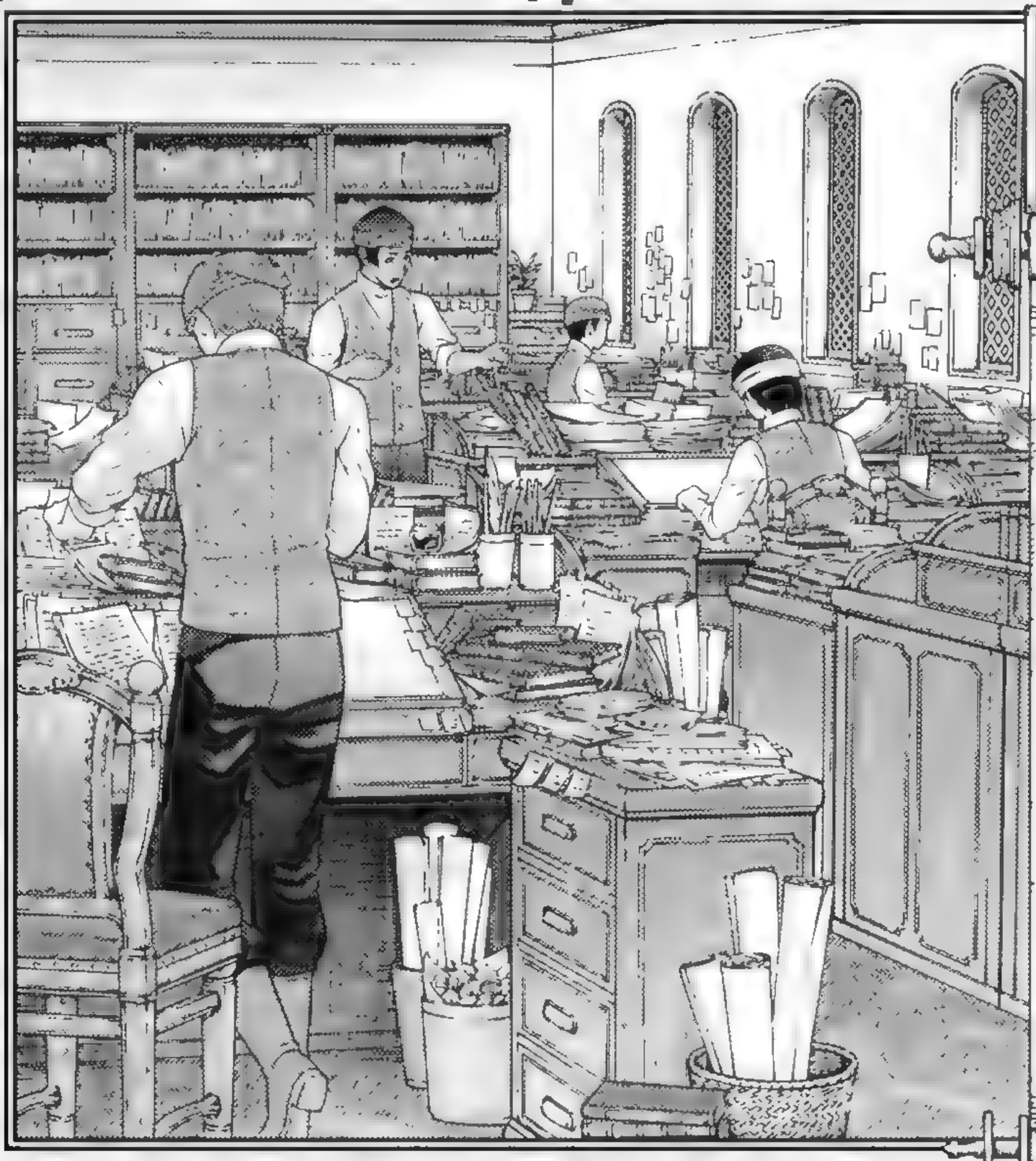


AFTZAAK'S LARGEST THEATER. THOUGH DEVOTED ENTIRELY TO STAGE PRODUCTIONS TODAY, ITS RESIDENT TROUPE IN FACT BEGAN AS A TRAVELING CIRCUS SPECIALIZING IN TRAINED ANIMALS. FOOD SCARCITY DURING THE GREAT WAR OBLIGED THE CIRCUS TO GIVE UP ITS ANIMALS AND DISBAND; LATER, MANY OF ITS PROMINENT MEMBERS WOULD REUNITE TO FORM A SMALL THEATER COMPANY, PERFORMING ADAPTATIONS OF WELL-KNOWN NOVELS IN CITY VENUES. IN MODERN TIMES, BUSINESS HAS FLOURISHED, WITH NUMEROUS PRODUCTIONS BASED ON POPULAR WORKS, INCLUDING ADAPTATIONS OF NOVELS BY TAWALS MANU.

"Those that incite the greatest fury are not the incomprehensible tragedies but the tedious comedies."

—from ***Mulligad***

QUITZE

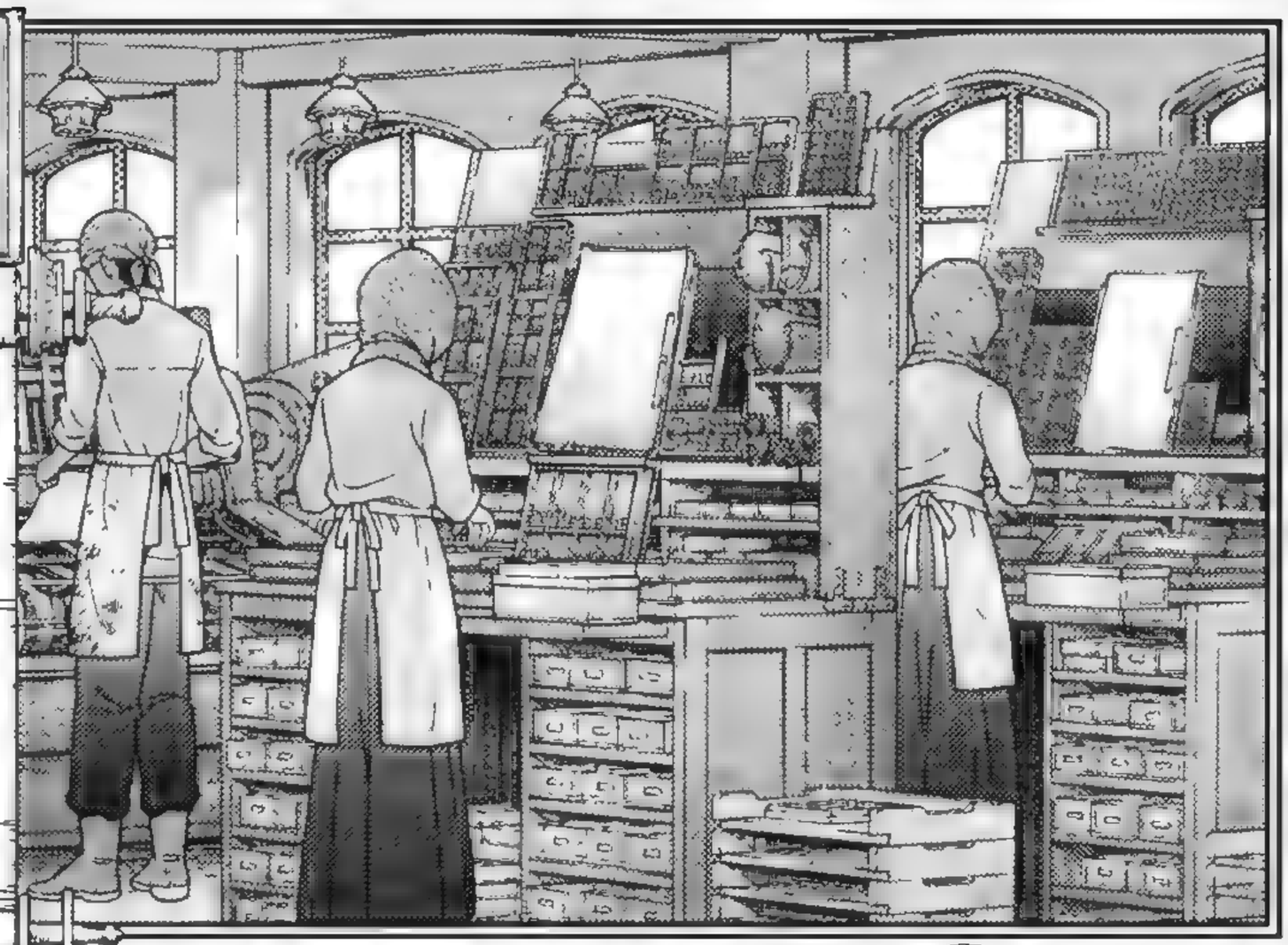


TODAY ONE OF AFTZAAK'S LARGEST PUBLISHERS AND THE POWERHOUSE BEHIND NUMEROUS SERIALIZED HITS, QUITZE GOT ITS START AS QUITZE UNIVERSITY PRESS, A RELATIVELY MINOR OPERATION DEVOTED EXCLUSIVELY TO TEXTBOOKS. EXPONENTIAL DEMAND FOR LITERATURE AMONG AFTZAAK'S POPULACE AND THE INABILITY OF EXISTING PUBLISHERS TO KEEP UP EVENTUALLY CONVINCED QUP TO EXPAND BEYOND ACADEMIA AND, ULTIMATELY, TO SPLIT FROM ITS PARENT INSTITUTION. RECENTLY, THE PUBLISHER HAS FOUND ITSELF ON UNSTEADY GROUND AS IT GRAPPLES WITH PUBLIC OUTCRY OVER THE EXTREME CONTENT OF ONE OF ITS MOST SUCCESSFUL PROPERTIES.

"The more crucial the endeavor, the more wearying it is."

—Ken Khloe

TSUNE PRESS

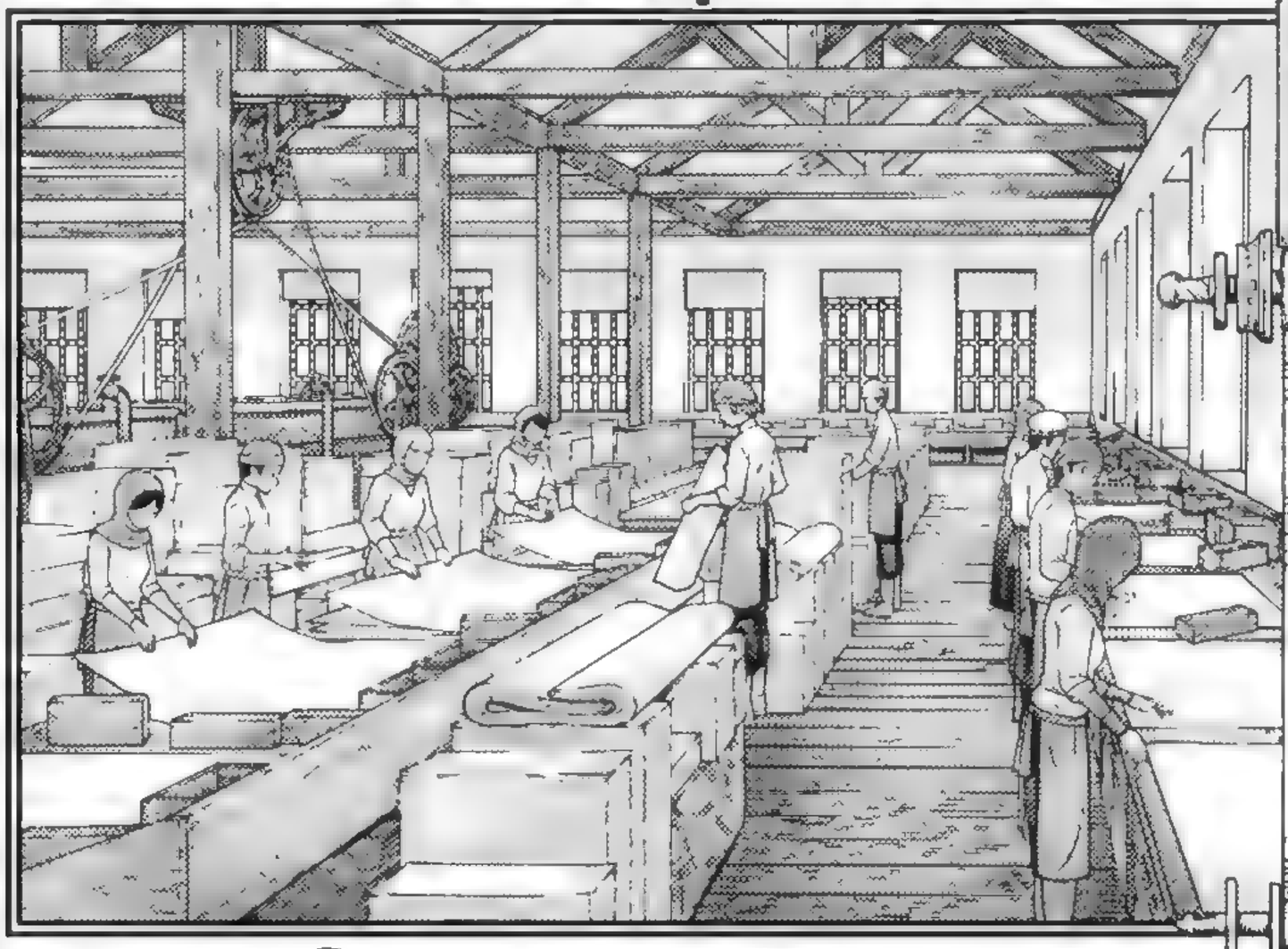


ONE OF THE MANY PRINTERS FOUND THROUGHOUT THE CAPITAL. AS TYPESETTING—THE PROCESS OF ARRANGING INDIVIDUAL LETTERS INTO WORDS AND LINES ON A PRESS—IS SUCH A LABOR-INTENSIVE JOB, THE INDUSTRY HAS CONSTANT DEMAND FOR MORE WORKERS. RECENT YEARS HAVE SEEN NUMEROUS PRESSES OPEN UP THEIR HIRING TO WOMEN, TYPICALLY IN PART-TIME ROLES.

"Some of us prefer to find our husbands from among the movable type."

—Sophie Schwimm

NACON PAPERMILL

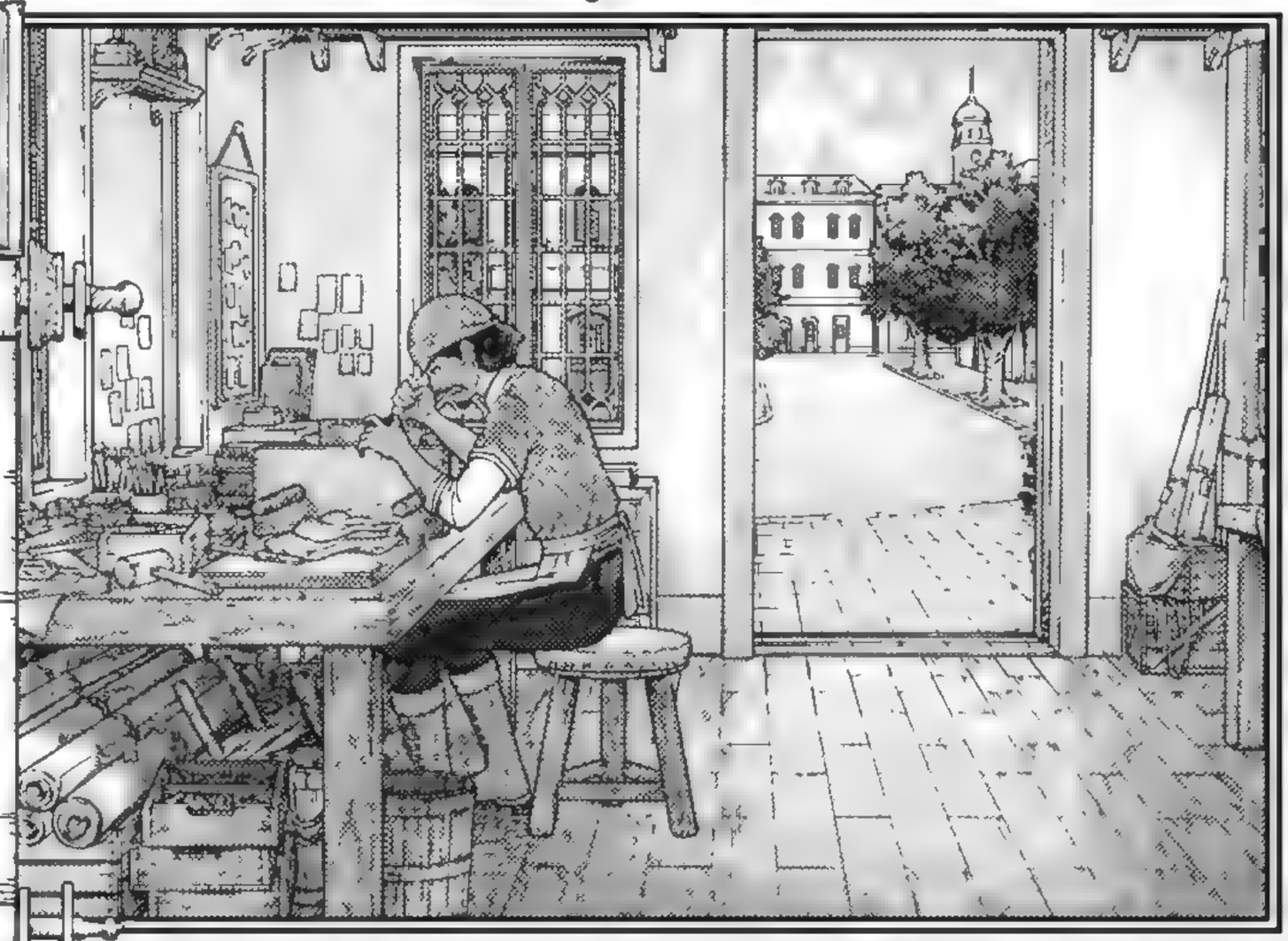


OF THE CAPITAL'S MANY PAPERMILLS, THIS ONE IS THE NEWEST. UNTIL RECENTLY, THE MAJORITY OF PAPER ON THE CONTINENT WAS MADE FROM OLD CLOTH. THE EMERGENCE OF MODERN TECHNIQUES FOR MAKING MUCH BRIGHTER PAPER WITH WOOD PULP IS FAST CHANGING THE INDUSTRY.

"When the war was goin', they's people hire ya to run out on the battlefields 'n' strip the clothes from the fallen to sell to the mills."

—an old woman recounting the past

COCA BINDERY



ONE OF NUMEROUS WORKSHOPS OPERATED BY INDEPENDENT ARTISANS ALL ACROSS THE CITY. BOOKBINDING SERVICES ARE ALWAYS IN HIGH DEMAND, BOTH FOR PRACTICAL REASONS AND BECAUSE BEAUTIFULLY BOUND TOMES ARE CONSIDERED EXCEPTIONALLY FASHIONABLE AND A KEY ELEMENT OF INTERIOR DESIGN.

"Books are meant to be enjoyed by the fingers as much as the eyes."

—Funan Konramil

28 You Are a Sage

SPLISH

SPSH

SPSH

MORNIN'!

I HEAR YOU'RE ON A ROLL. TESTS DONE ON TIME FOR THREE DAYS RUN-NING.

WE STILL ON AFTER LUNCH? REMEMBER TO EAT QUICK.

I KNOW.

IT'S ABOUT THOSE BOOKS SHE HURLED AROUND. SHE'S BEEN GOIN' IN TO FIX THE ONES THAT BROKE.

OVER AT THE RESTORA-TIONS OFFICE.

AND I'VE BEEN GOIN' ALONG TO HELP OUT.

AND *WHY*, PRAY TELL?

WHAT WAS THAT ABOUT?

DO YOU TWO HAVE SOME STANDING ARRANGE-MENT?

GRAB

THE DAY OF, WHEN I HELPED HER CARRY 'EM INTO THE OFFICE?

OH, IT'S NOT. IT'S JUST THAT...

...SEE...

HOW IS ANY OF THAT *YOUR* RESPONSI-BILITY?

R-R-MMMBLL

I'M GONNA KILL HER.

KILL HER?!

WHOA, WHOA. I DON'T LIKE THE LOOK IN YOUR EYES, NANAKO.

WHAT ARE YOU GONNA DO TO THAT KID?

WHIRL

YOU MISUNDER-STAND.

I'M JUST SUGGEST-ING THAT THE TRAINEE MIGHT MEET WITH A VERY UNFORTUNATE ACCIDENT.

COME ON, NOW.

WE CAN'T HAVE YOU MURDERING PEOPLE. IF YOU END UP IN THE SLAMMER, WHO'S GONNA HELP ME WITH MY REPAIR WORK?

THE STACK OF BOOKS IN OUR CARE ARE THE ONES THAT WERE DAMAGED IN THE PROCESS.

...AN UNIDENTIFIED YOUNG KAFNA WAS BUSY REARRANGING VOLUMES ON A SHELF WHEN THE WHOLE BOOKCASE HAPPENED TO TIP OVER.

AS FAR AS ANY OF US IN RESTO-RATIONS KNOW...

...AS A YOUNG, ARDENT LOVER OF LITERATURE, RATHER THAN A MISCREANT WHO THINKS IT ACCEPTABLE TO THROW BOOKS.

WHICH IS HONESTLY GREAT NEWS FOR OUR LITTLE TRAINEE, BECAUSE IT MEANS SHE'LL BE REMEMBERED...

RMMBLLL

KACHK
スチャ

TIME TO SET THE SCENE FOR THE PERFECT CRIME.

SHTIING

I see where you're going.

HRMM...

ALL RIGHT. I'M DOWN.

I'LL FIX THEM MYSELF. EVERY ONE OF THEM!

I... I'M...

I'M REALLY SORRY ABOUT WHAT I DID.

OH, DEAR MAGUS ...

... THEY'RE REALLY GONNA DO IT.

...SO PLEASE... PLEASE JUST SPARE ME MY LIFE!

I KNOW I'VE DONE A TERRIBLE THING...

CAN YOU BELIEVE IT? ALL THAT ATTITUDE, GONE IN A FLASH!

HA HA HA!

EW. GROSS.

BFFT!

AND ANYWAY, IT'S BEEN A RELIEF TO SEE...

...SO I FIGURED, WHY NOT VOLUN-TEER?

I'M GUNNING FOR THE RESTORATIONS OFFICE! IT'S THE PERFECT CHANCE TO BUILD SOME CONNEC-TIONS THERE...

BUT I *STILL* DON'T UNDER-STAND WHY YOU'RE LENDING A HAND.

...DON'T COUNT FOR SQUAT IN THE FACE OF RAW, UNBRIDLED SKILL.

...THAT ALL THE BLUSTER AND CONCEIT IN THE WORLD...

CHATTER CHATTER

BUSTLE BUSTLE

KTNK

TNK

CHATTER

CHATTER

CHATTER

CHATTER

MANY APOLOGIES FOR THE WAIT, ANZU.

OUR TEA IS READY AT LAST.

SURELY AT THIS POINT YOU'VE GOT THE CLOUT TO REQUEST A DESK JOB?

YOU'RE A BUSY WOMAN. I'VE BEEN TRYING TO ARRANGE THIS MEETING FOR SOME TIME.

YOUR COLLEAGUES TELL ME YOU'RE STILL SPENDING QUITE A BIT OF TIME ON THE ROAD.

...AS NUANCED AN UNDERSTANDING AS I'M ABLE.

YES, I'VE ALREADY INQUIRED WITH ALL HIS SISTERS AT THE LIBRARY.

STILL, I TEND TO FEEL THAT EVEN AMONG FAMILY, EACH MEMBER IS ABLE TO OFFER SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT INSIGHT, AND I'D OF COURSE LIKE TO POSSESS...

I HAVE TO SAY, THOUGH, YOUR INVITATION SURPRISED ME. IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR ADVICE ON SUMOMO, YOU'VE GOT SO MANY OTHER OPTIONS. I KNOW MOMOKA WOULD BE HAPPY TO HELP.

OH, EVEN AT THIS AGE, I FIND THE APPEAL OF LIAISONS IS BEING OUT IN THE THICK OF IT, EXPERIENCING THE WORLD.

HEAVENS ...

...YOU ALMOST MAKE IT SOUND LIKE THE WOMEN IN OUR HOUSEHOLD ARE *SCARY!*

ALTHOUGH, FROM WHAT I'VE BEEN ABLE TO OBSERVE THUS FAR, IT'S CLEAR ENOUGH ***HOW*** HE DEVELOPED THIS DEEP-SEATED FEAR OF WOMEN.

...AND I'M HAVING TROUBLE FIGURING OUT HOW TO HELP HIM COPE.

THE LONG AND SHORT OF IT IS THAT YOUR SON WANTS NOTHING TO DO WITH THE FEMALE TRAINEES...

AS HEAD SUPERVISOR, IT'S NOW PART OF MY DUTY TO INSTILL FEAR.

PROBABLY BECAUSE I WAS STILL ONLY AN ASSISTANT WHEN YOUR CLASS OF TRAINEES CAME THROUGH.

NOT THAT I HAVE ANY IDEA WHY. YOU ALWAYS SEEMED PERFECTLY PLEASANT TO ME.

AND IT'S NOT AS IF YOU HAVEN'T DEVELOPED YOUR OWN REPUTATION AROUND THE LIBRARY, MS. "RULU OHWAI."

...AND HAVE THE STUDENTS WELCOME EVERY SPECK OF PRAISE WITH OPEN GRATITUDE.

MUCH BETTER TO BE PERCEIVED FIRST AS STERN...

YOUNG HEARTS ARE FICKLE THINGS.

I FIND IT'S COUNTERPRODUCTIVE TO START OUT WARM, AS ANY ATTEMPT AT DISCIPLINE THEREAFTER INEVITABLY SOURS THE RELATION-SHIP.

I SUPPOSE IN THAT REGARD, I'M MERELY TAKING AFTER PROFESSOR TOTEC.

WHEN I RAISE MY VOICE, ALL I'M DOING IS TRYING VERY HARD TO APPEAR THAT I HAVE SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT TO CONVEY.

HMHM!

SOUNDS LIKE BRAIN-WASHING.

EDUCATING IS THE PREFERRED TERM, I BELIEVE.

HOPEFULLY HE HASN'T BEEN CRUSHED TO DEATH UNDER A STACK OF THOSE DUSTY OLD TOMES HE DEALS IN.

MM. I WONDER HOW THE OLD PROFESSOR IS DOING THESE DAYS.

AH... AH... AH- CHOO!

BLESS YOU!

I MEANT *GRAND-CHILDREN.*

HOW MANY DOES YOUR BROOD NUMBER THESE DAYS?

OH!

THAT'S QUITE THE CLAN.

WE JUST WELCOMED NUMBER FOUR.

HEAVENS! STILL EIGHT, JUST LIKE BEFORE.

IN ANY CASE, I'VE NOT MUCH TO BOAST OF. IN TERMS OF LIFE EXPERIENCE, I'M SURE I DON'T HOLD A CANDLE TO YOU.

WELL, I'VE GOT THE FUTURE OF THE HYDIAH TO THINK ABOUT.

SO YOU'VE GOT HIM BRAIN-WASHED?

IT'S CALLED *TRUE LOVE*, THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

HMPH...

ALL I HAVE TO DO IS FLASH A SMILE, AND HE'S UP AND TAKING CARE OF ALL THE CHORES.

OF COURSE, WE ONLY MANAGE THANKS TO MY DARLING HUSBAND.

THERE'S A THEO FUMIS IN YOUR CLASS THIS YEAR, YES?

OH! THAT REMINDS ME...

NOT ME. BUT I CAN INTRODUCE YOU TO SOMEONE WHO DOES.

AND I BELIEVE THE INDIVIDUAL IN QUESTION IS WITH THE STEWARD OF LIAISONS RIGHT AT THIS MO-MENT. SHALL I ESCORT YOU?

NO. I JUST THOUGHT YOU MIGHT BE HAVING TROUBLE SCROUNG-ING UP A CHARACTER REFERENCE.

HAS SUMOMO MENTIONED HIM?

THAT'S RIGHT.

I TAKE IT YOU HAVE SOME INSIGHT TO SHARE?

HM. WELL, IT'S TRUE THERE ISN'T ANYONE ELSE AT THE LIBRARY FROM AMUN.

?

SNAP

BUUU

GASP

WHOA!

WHOA!

WHOA!

WOBBLE

YOU'VE BEEN NEGLECTING YOUR TRAINING.

I'D ASSUMED YOU ABLE TO KEEP A CLEAR MIND MUCH LONGER THAN THAT.

FWATMP

KATHUNK

LIFE AS A STEWARD *IS* AWFULLY BUSY.

AT LEAST, THAT'S THE EXCUSE I WOULD USE IF I WERE TALKING TO ANYONE ELSE.

PERHAPS YOU'VE GROWN LAX SINCE YOU WERE NAMED A SAGE?

THE VACILLATOR
STEWARD OF THE LIAISONS OFFICE
TOGID ELGAMUTH
(CANDIDATE FOR GENERAL REPRESENTATIVE)

...YOU FOREVER RISK BEING SWALLOWED UP AND DESTROYED BY YOUR OWN FORMIDABLE POWER.

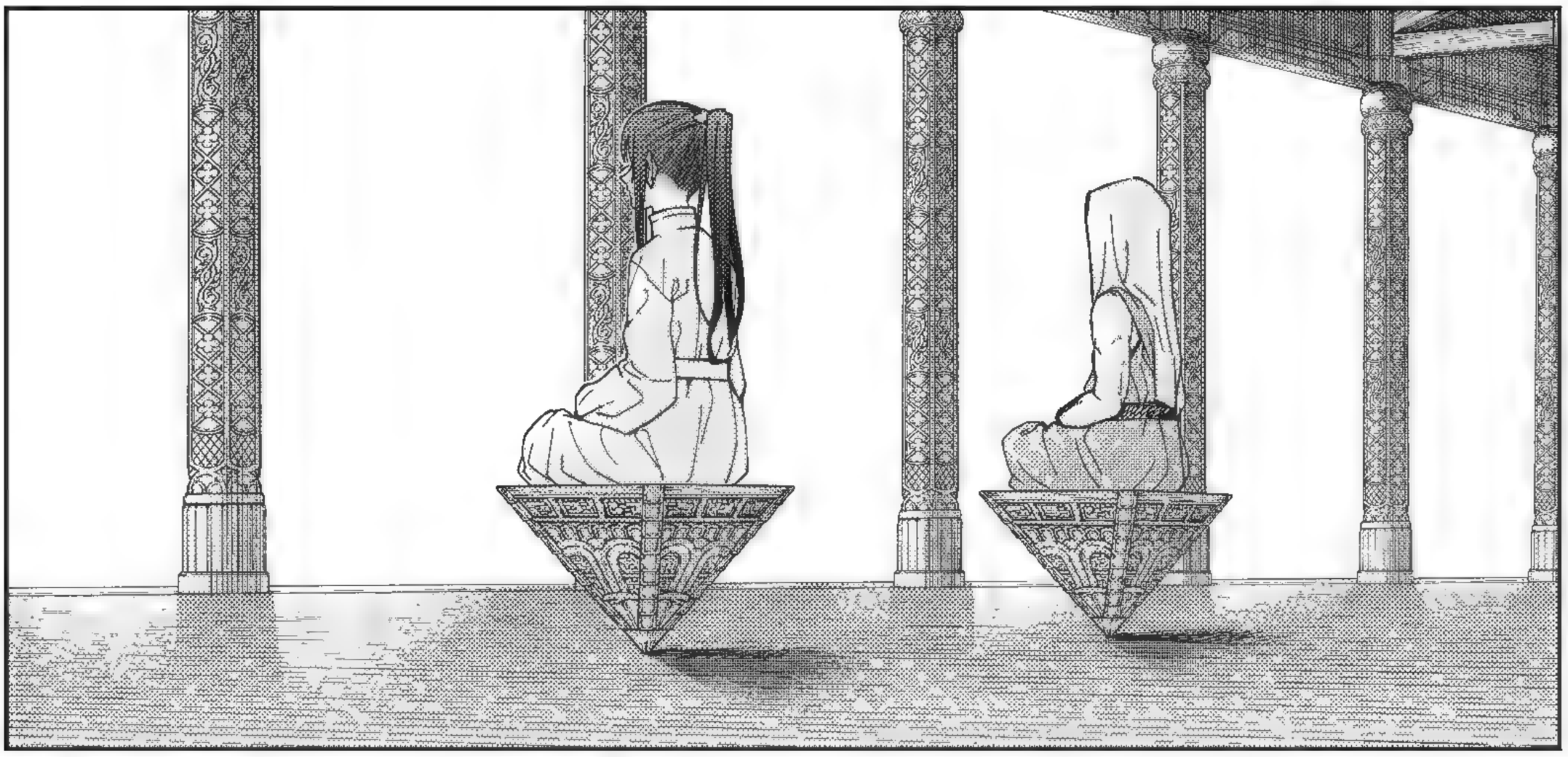
UNTIL YOU POSSESS THE CALM TO KEEP IT INTACT FROM MORNING TO NIGHT...

THE VESSEL'S TAIL UNRAVELS WITH EVEN THE TINIEST SHIFT IN MANA.

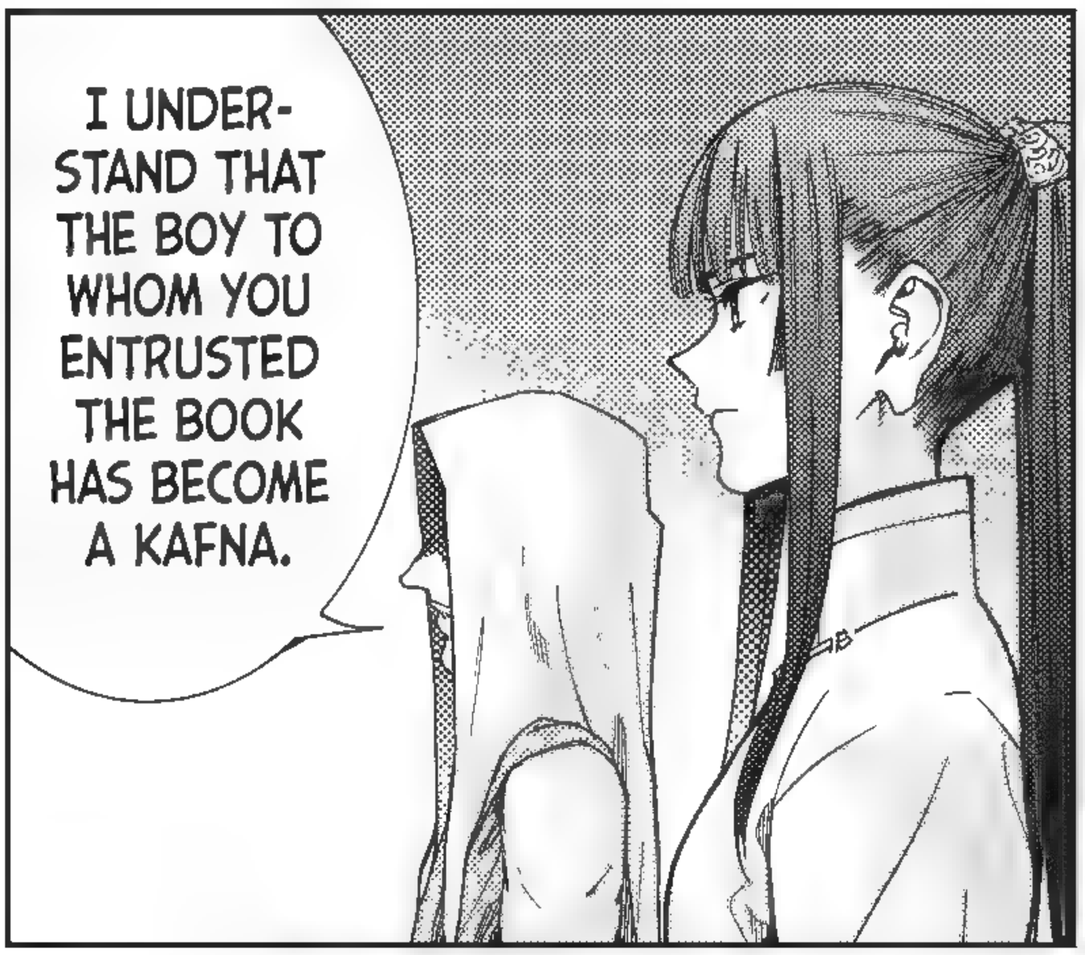
YOU KNOW ME TOO WELL, MASTER TOGID.

BUT YOU HAVE A FRUSTRATING ABILITY TO AP-PEAR PERFECTLY COLLECTED WHEN IN FACT YOU ARE NOT.

NORMALLY, I WOULD PREFER NOT TO COMPLICATE OUR MEDITATION SESSIONS WITH SUCH BAUBLES.




YES... THAT'S RIGHT.


I UNDER-STAND THAT THE BOY TO WHOM YOU ENTRUSTED THE BOOK HAS BECOME A KAFNA.


ANYONE POSSESSING THE FIRST SHRED OF WISDOM WOULD KNOW BETTER THAN TO PLACE A BOOK LIKE THAT IN THE HANDS OF A POOR VILLAGE BOY.
YES, I CAN CERTAINLY BELIEVE THAT. YOU *MUST* NOT THINK THINGS THROUGH.


I HAVE NO PLANS.
IS THIS ALL IN ACCORDANCE WITH YOUR PLANS?

IT IS EXCEPTIONALLY RARE FOR OPINIONS WE FIND OBJECTIONABLE TO NOT CONTAIN AT LEAST A TINY KERNEL OF TRUTH. AND HERE THIS SMALL, IMPOVERISHED BOY...

...WHO WANTED NOTHING MORE THAN THE FREEDOM TO READ, HAD MANAGED TO GRASP ONE SUCH KERNEL AND TO ACCEPT IT.

HE RELATED THE TALE NOT WITH FURY BUT AN AIR OF RESIGNED ACCEPTANCE, AS IF HE EMPATHIZED WITH THE CARETAKER'S DECISION.

I SAID I HAVE NO *PLANS*. NOT THAT I DIDN'T THINK IT THROUGH.

DURING MY VISIT, THEO FUMIS SHARED WITH ME HOW HE HAD BEEN SINGLED OUT BY THE CARETAKER OF THE VILLAGE LIBRARY AND FORBIDDEN ANY ACCESS TO ITS COLLECTION.

...IF THERE IS ANYONE WHO MIGHT BE ABLE TO CARRY ON KNOWING THE BURDEN OF THOSE PAGES-

WHEN I SAW THAT, I REALIZED...

AND HOW CRUEL THAT YOUR TEST SHOULD SUCCEED.

HOW CRUEL YOU ARE.

IT *SICKENS* ME THAT YOU SHOULD USE THEO FUMIS TO BOLSTER YOUR FAITH IN THE WORKINGS OF FATE.

BETTER THE BOY HAD NEGLECTED THE BOOK AND ALLOWED IT TO WASTE AWAY TO TATTERS AT THE EDGE OF THE WORLD, FORCING YOU TO CONFRONT YOUR FOLLY.

IT IS ONLY WHEN WE ANTICIPATE THE WORST THAT WE ARE PREPARED TO FACE THE FUTURE.

YOU ARE A STEWARD. YOU CAN NO LONGER AFFORD TO REGARD THE WORLD WITH UN-QUESTIONING FAITH.

FATE IS A CARDCASTLE, SEDONA. IT IS NOT A COMPASS BY WHICH TO ACT.

Goodness! Betrayed by my mana, I suppose?

I'M TERRIBLY SORRY TO DISTURB, MASTER STEWARD.

ANZU. WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU?

Shhh!

LOOKS LIKE WE MAY HAVE TO WAIT A WHILE.

THINK NOTHING OF IT. SEDONA AND I WERE JUST WRAP-PING UP.

ANZU! PROFES-SOR XTOH!

SHALL WE CALL IT A DAY, THEN?

AS YOU WISH. WE'LL AWAIT MASTER SEDONA OUT-SIDE.

I REQUIRE NO THANKS.

TELL HER TO SPEND THAT TIME INSTEAD AT HOME WITH HER HUSBAND AND CHILD.

OH! THAT REMINDS ME... MOMOKA WONDERS IF SHE MIGHT STOP BY TO SAY THANK YOU FOR THE BABY GIFTS. THEY WERE TERRIBLY THOUGHTFUL.

SEDONA.

THE BOOK. THERE ARE *OTHERS* SEARCHING FOR IT, ARE THERE NOT?

BY MY ESTIMATE, I AM ILL-FIT TO BE LEADING OTHERS.

YOU ARE QUITE CORRECT. I *AM* LACKING IN A GREAT MANY WAYS.

...OR ELSE...

EITHER THEY ARE STILL UNAWARE THAT THE BOOK IS IN YOUNG THEO'S POSSES-SION...

MASTER TOGID.

LOATH AS I AM TO ADMIT IT, SECRETING IT AWAY IN AMUN MAY HAVE BEEN A CLEVER GAMBIT.

A SORT OF...

...SILVER LINING TO YOUR FOLLY.

I STAND WHERE I AM ONLY THANKS TO COUNTLESS BLESSINGS.

AND CHIEF AMONG THEM ALL...

HRNGH!

MISAKI.

...ARE THE GREAT MANY COMPANIONS I HAVE WHO MAKE UP FOR MY SHORT-COMINGS.

HRAH!

"HOW IS THE INVESTI-GATION COM-ING?"

"STILL NO PROGRESS TO SPEAK OF."

NOT YET.

HOW ABOUT THAT ONE WE LIKE? I COULD REALLY GO FOR SOME CAT.

THE WEEKEND IS COMING. HAVE YOU PICKED OUT A PLACE FOR US TO EAT?

"ALREADY CIRCULATING AMONG THE TRAINEES."

YES. SEEMS TO BE ALL THE RAGE AMONG THE KIDS. IT'S *ALL THEY TALK ABOUT.*

KLANG

KLANG

HI-YAH!

TAKE THAT!

"AND CYNTHEA LOH TEI AND THE TALK OF SUCCES-SION?"

MM. I HEAR THAT SHOP'S OPENED UP A SECOND LOCATION.

"NO FIRM NUMBER, BUT WE SHOULD ASSUME AT LEAST ONE."

...BUT I THINK WE OUGHT TO EXPECT THERE'LL BE A LINE AND PLAN ACCORDINGLY.

HARD TO SAY...

"...AMONG THE LIBRARY'S NEWEST MEMBERS?"

"AND HOW MANY UN-WELCOME GUESTS DO WE THINK SLIPPED IN..."

HOW BIG OF A CROWD DO YOU THINK WE'LL SEE?

WELL, I'M GAME. BUT I AM A BIT CONCERNED ABOUT THE WAIT.

MASTER SHINJI! COULD I TROUBLE YOU FOR A BOUT?

YES, SIR!

I'D BE DE-LIGHTED!

ME, TOO.

LOOKING FORWARD TO IT.

PAT 110 9

PIT 110 9

WHEN DID THIS START?

MAYBE I JUST DIDN'T NOTICE UNTIL I SETTLED INTO LIFE AT THE LIBRARY...

BUT LATELY, I'VE GOT THE STRANGEST SENSE...

...THAT I'M BEING FOLLOWED.

ドーン

P-TMP

FWAM

HEH...

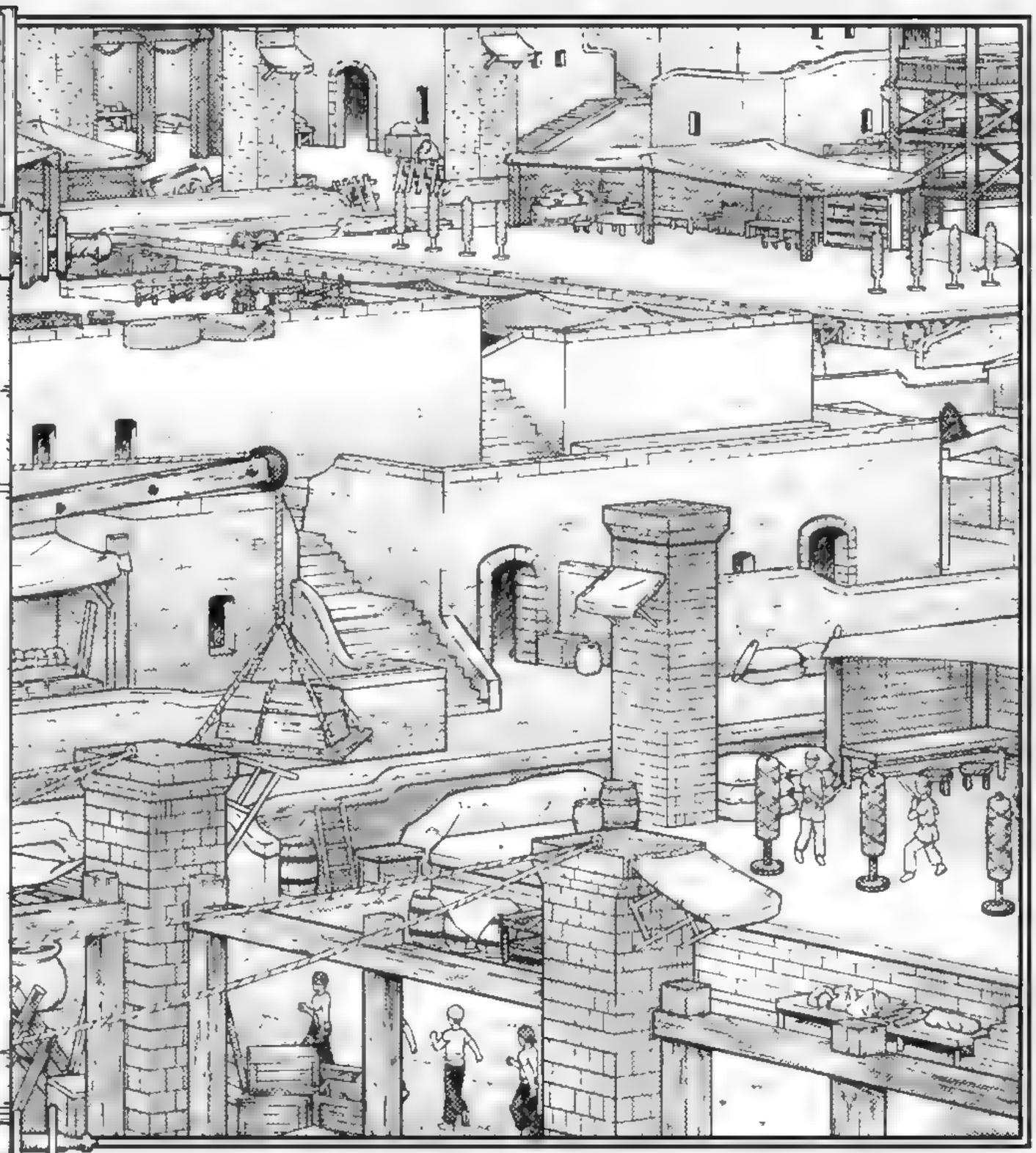

GUESS IT'S JUST MY IMAGINATION.

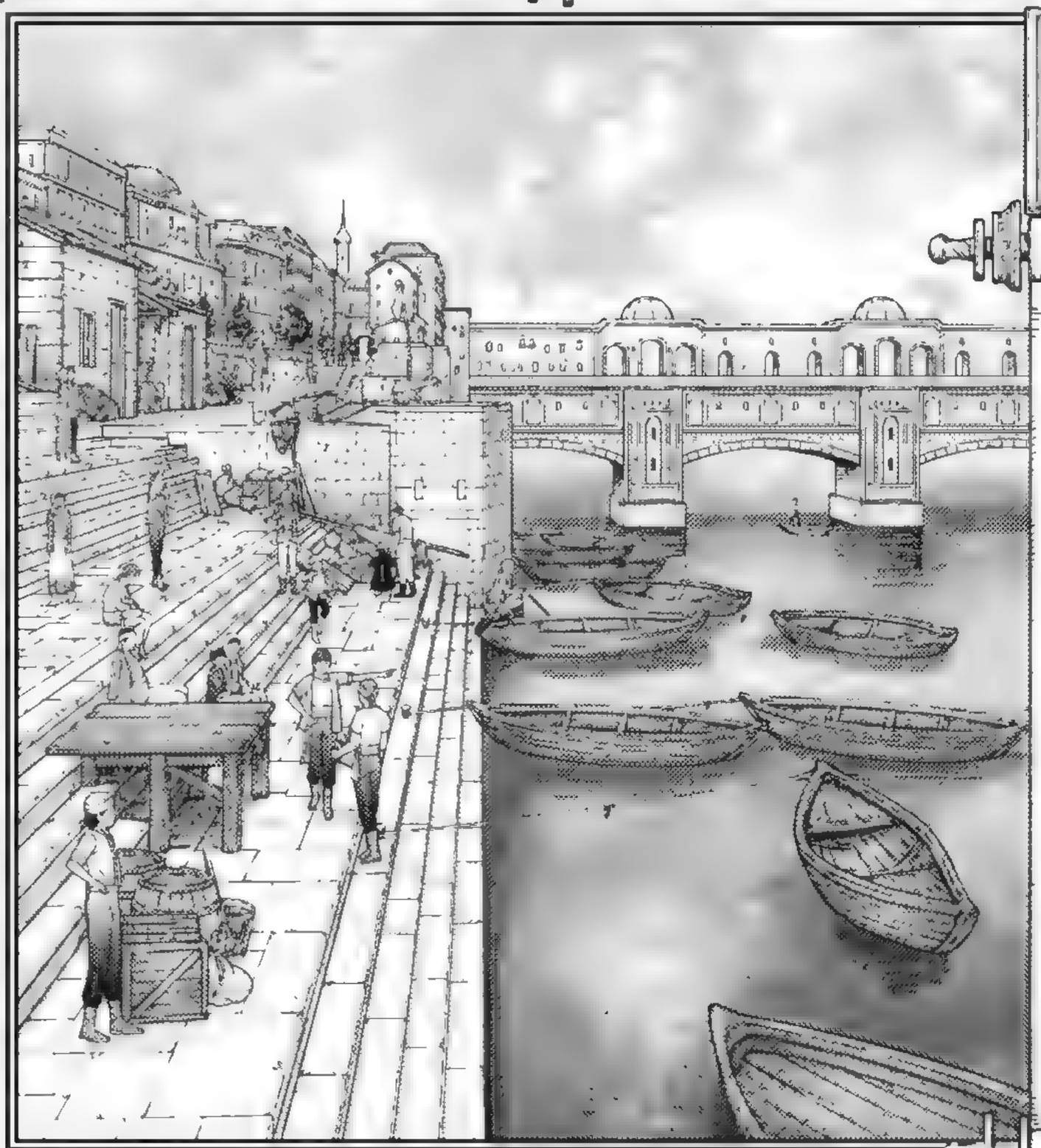
AFTZAAK CITY WATCH

A VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION THAT SEES TO THE SAFETY OF THE CAPITAL, PROVIDING RELIEF FOR EVERYTHING FROM FIRES TO MEDICAL EMERGENCIES. MEMBERS COME PRIMARILY FROM THE CITY'S WORKING CLASS, AND THE ORGANIZATION ITSELF BEARS NO TIES OR OBLIGATIONS TO THE ROYAL FAMILY, NOBILITY, MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT, OR CENTRAL LIBRARY, ENSURING ITS ABILITY TO OPERATE INDEPENDENTLY AND IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE CITIZENRY.

"No firmer a foundation for the future than justice."

—a famous rallying cry



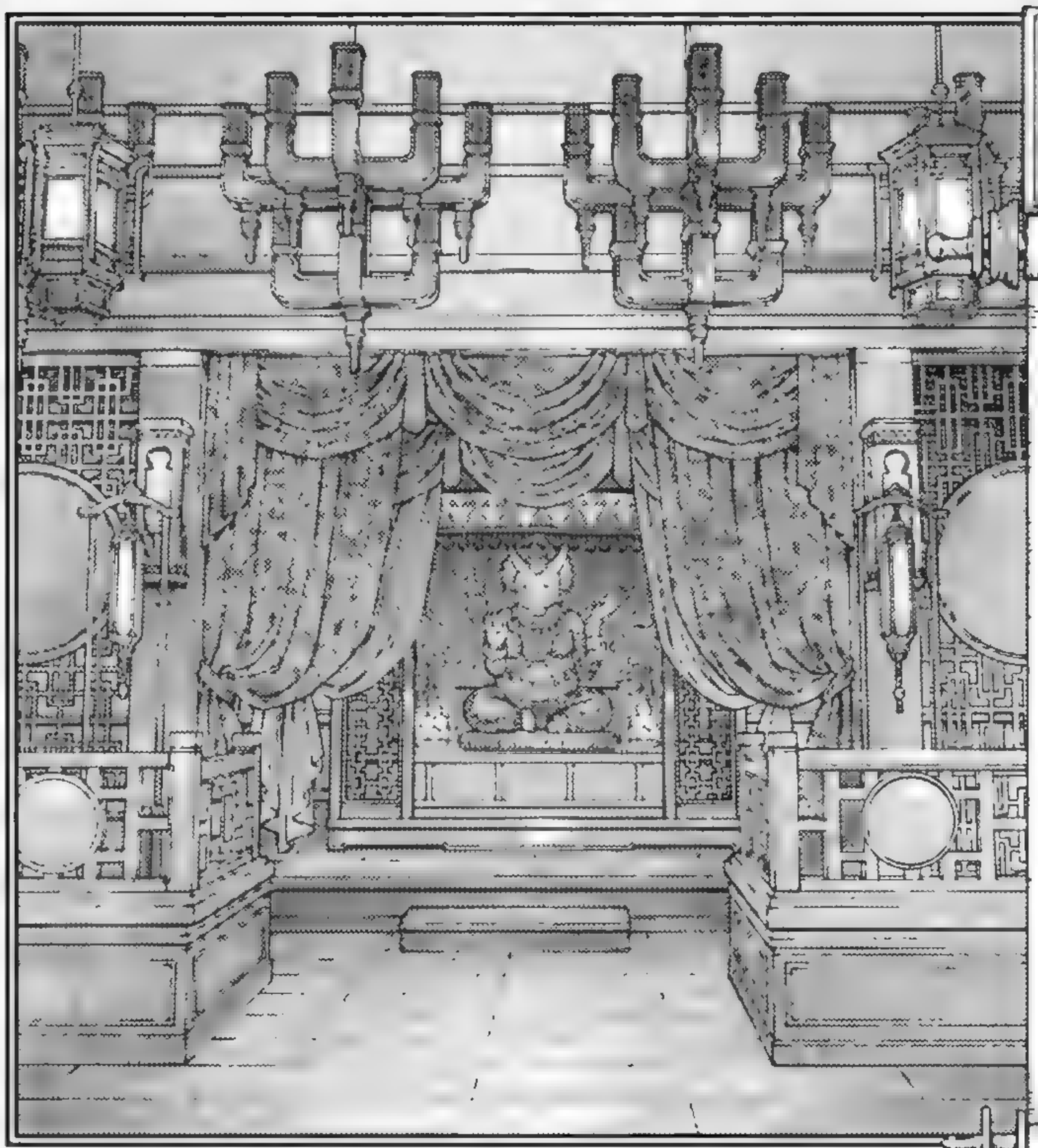


AFTA RIVER

ORIGINATING AT LAKE TATA, THIS MAJOR RIVER PASSES JUST NORTH OF THE CAPITAL PROPER. THE AFTA—WHOSE NAME MEANS "THE SUN'S NOONTIME RAYS"—IS THOUGHT TO BE THE PRIMARY BODY OF WATER AROUND WHICH THE REGION'S EARLIEST CIVILIZATIONS DEVELOPED. THE CITY OF AFTZAAK TAKES ITS NAME FROM THE CREATOR DEITY WORSHIPED BY THOSE CIVILIZATIONS, AND THE DEITY IN TURN IS THOUGHT TO OWE ITS NAME TO THE RIVER.

"Catch the swift winds, that they might guide you to safety."

—a Rakta sailor



ALDEBARA TEMPLE

A SUPERB EXAMPLE OF TRADITIONAL KADOE ARCHITECTURE, THIS TEMPLE WAS BUILT AT THE HEIGHT OF IMPERIAL RULE, WHEN THE MASKED EMPIRE'S DOMAIN ENCOMPASSED AFTZAAK ALONG WITH MUCH OF THE REST OF THE CONTINENT. AFTER THE CITY REGAINED INDEPENDENCE, THE TEMPLE WAS SAVED FROM DEMOLITION BY GENERAL CUPUL, WHO WAS DETERMINED TO SEE IT PRESERVED AS A PIECE OF AFTZAAK HISTORY. AS PART OF HIS PUSH TO CONVINCE THE POPULACE, THE GENERAL ORDERED THE INTERIOR REFITTED FOR USE AS AN ASIN PLACE OF WORSHIP. TODAY, THE TEMPLE IS A POPULAR SITE AMONG TOURISTS FOR ITS UNIQUE FUSION OF ASIN AND SIGMA ("KI") ELEMENTS.

"The bigger the better. That goes for buildings, 'n' for muscles, too."

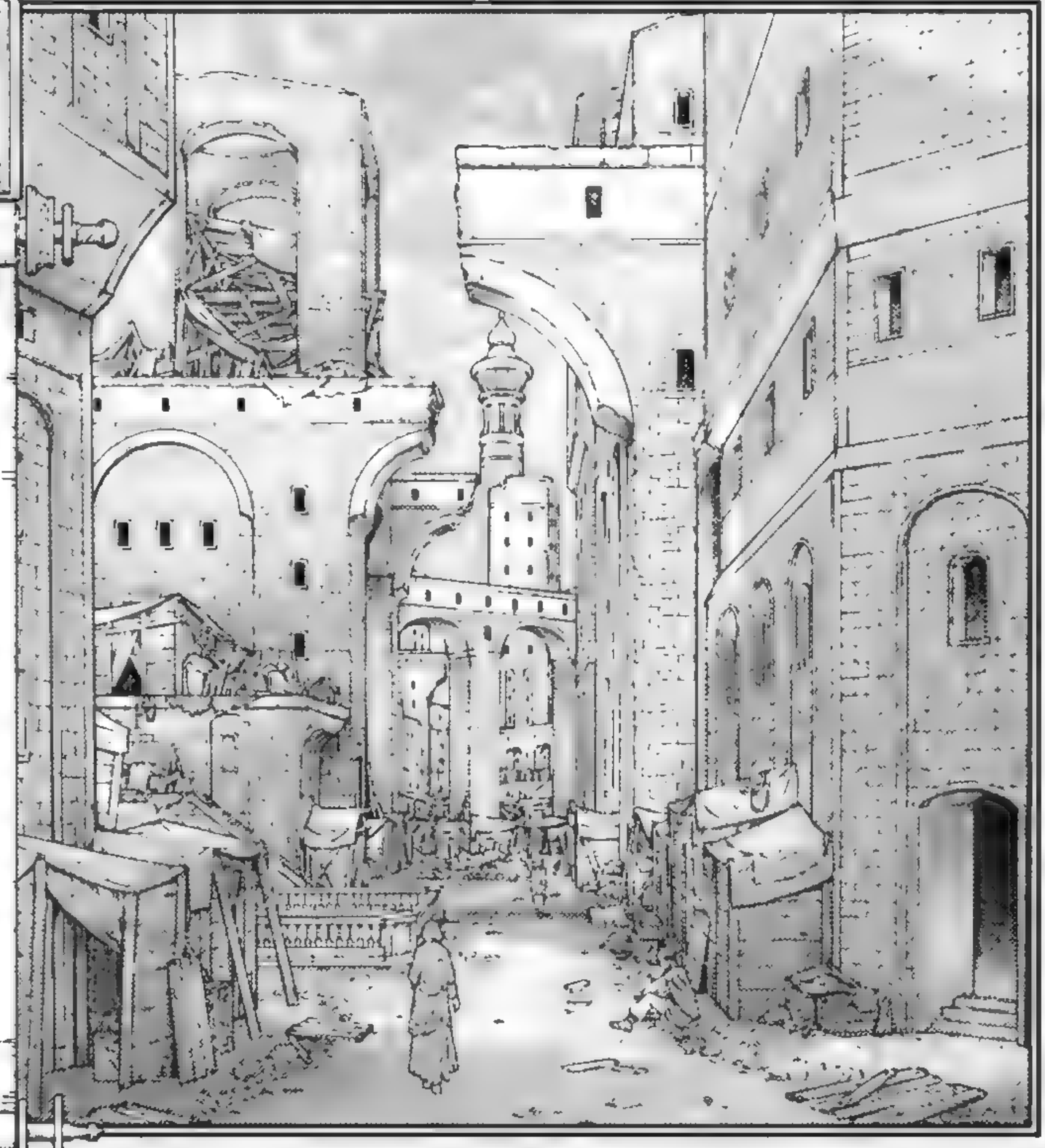
—Daem Yappan

THE GREAT NORTHERN SLUMS

THIS SPRAWLING, IMPOVERISHED NEIGHBORHOOD IS NESTLED AMONG THE RUINS OF THE OLD AFTZAAK CITY CENTER. AFTZAAK'S REPUTATION DRAWS A CONSTANT STREAM OF IMMIGRANTS FROM EACH OF THE SURROUNDING AUTONOMOUS REGIONS, OFTEN IN EXCESS OF THE CAPITAL'S DEMAND FOR LABOR. THOSE UNABLE TO SECURE WORK QUICKLY FIND THEIR RESOURCES DRAINED BY AFTZAAK'S HIGH COST OF LIVING, AFTER WHICH THEY TYPICALLY END UP HERE AT THE NORTHERN FRINGE. AFTZAAK'S SLUMS, HOWEVER, ARE NOTED FOR THEIR RELATIVELY LOW CRIME RATES AND FOR THE WIDESPREAD UTILIZATION OF SCHOOLS AND LIBRARIES AMONG RESIDENTS.

"Unseemly behavior permits no fertile mind."

—Togid Elgamuth



HOOT
HOOT
HOOT
HOOT
HOOT

29 The Melancholy of Tutull Xiu

SKRT
SKRT
SKRT

WE'RE GONNA BE LATE FOR OUR MORNING JOG!

SOPHIE! IT'S MORNING!

SHE'S STILL AWAKE? WHAT TIME IS IT...?

SKRT

C'MON! YOU GOTTA GET UP!

MMMM...

SKRT

SKRT

SKRT


HELP ME UP...
WHY DO I HAVE TO PULL YOU OUT OF BED?!

And now for my glasses...

They were upside down.

OOPS. NOT THAT WAY.

MOST APPRE-CIATED.

TA-DAH! ALL DONE!

Brum-br-brum

Aid-ee-aid

YOU AREN'T A *BLUNDER DEMON*, ARE YOU?!

H-HOLD ON!

...!

DUN

DUN

DUN

YES! IT IS I! THE BLUNDER DEMON OF THE LIBRARY!

ZRSH...

SO YOU'VE DISCOVERED MY SECRET, HAVE YOU?

ㅋLTNK

TMP TMP TMP

I'VE PUT MY LIPINE ON BACK-WARD, AND NOW I CAN'T SEE!

TMP TMP TMP TMP TMP

DRAT!

HAVE AT YOU!

YOUR DAYS ARE DONE, FOUL DEMON!

ZWISH

KA

SPLAT

NGRF!

EVASIVE MANEU-VER!

FWIP

NGH-HH...

THE BLUNDER DEMON HAS BLUN-DERED RIGHT INTO A WALL...

HURRAH!

WELL, THERE IT IS. INCONTROVERTIBLE PROOF THAT JUST BECAUSE YOU'RE OLD DOESN'T MEAN YOU'RE AN *ADULT*.

They are so loud...

HA HA HA HA HA!

ULTIMATE TUTULL COMBO ATTACK, READY TO ACTIVATE!

GO!

MWA HA HA!

YOU'LL NEVER DEFEAT THE GLASSES MONSTER!

GRAW-WWR-RR!

Graaah! Curse you and your spec-tacular combo!

REALLY, MISS SOPHIE, I'M STARTING TO WORRY YOU MIGHT *NEVER* GROW UP!

HAAAH...

I WISH HE'D HURRY UP AND GET MARRIED. ANY TAKERS?

NINE-TEEN.

THAT OLD?!

OOF. I'M NOT SURE IF I'M READY TO HAVE *YOU* AS MY MOTHER-IN-LAW.

HEY, MISS SOPHIE, IS IT TRUE YOU HAVE A SON?

HOW OLD IS HE?

HEHE!

THANKS FOR BEING A GOOD SPORT ABOUT MY GAMES.

THAT MAKES *TOTAL* SENSE! YOU ARE *SO* NOT A CITY GIRL.

PARDON ME. I NEED TO USE THE LADIES' ROOM.

...

WHERE'D YOU HEAR THAT?

I'M FROM KAMUI. WAAAY OUT IN THE STICKS.

YOUR HOME IS HERE IN AFTZAAK, ISN'T IT?

DOES THAT MEAN YOUR SON WORKS IN THE CITY?

Goodness...

DON'T SAY IT LIKE *THAT!*

I NEED TO TAKE A DUMP. I'LL GO WITH!

GREAT!

BEGINNING TODAY, THE QUANTITY OF PROBLEMS WILL INCREASE BY TEN PERCENT.

TH-TH-THMP

NOW THAT WE'RE ALL CONSISTENTLY MANAGING WITHIN THE TIME LIMIT, I'VE DECIDED TO STEP THINGS UP.

BRING IT ON!

TEST TIME. TAKE ONE AND PASS IT BACK.

WHAT WAS *THAT* NOISE?

A TRIPLE FACE PLANT BY THE TERRIBLE TRIO.

WOOF, WOOF!

HAAAH...

HEY, TUTULL...

YOU ROOM WITH MISS SOPHIE, RIGHT?

ACTUALLY, MISS SOPHIE DOESN'T LIVE TOO FAR FROM MY PARENTS.

HER HOUSE IS LIKE A HUGE MANSION.

WHAT'S SHE LIKE?

SHE'S SUPER FUN! AND REALLY SILLY.

HUH.

YUP.

THAT'S RIGHT.

DON'T YOU THINK IT'S STRANGE? WHY WOULD ANYONE SUDDENLY GET A JOB AT HER AGE?

WHY NOT ASK HER YOURSELF?

NO WAY! I DON'T WANNA MAKE HER FEEL BAD!

SHE'S GOT REALLY WEIRD TASTE IN CLOTHES, SO SHE'S IMPOSSIBLE TO MISS. I WOULD'VE **NEVER** IMAGINED SHE'D END UP HERE IN OUR CLASS.

I USED TO SEE HER OUT WALKING SOMETIMES ON MY WAY HOME FROM SCHOOL.

THIS MORNING, SHE SAID HER HOME IS IN KAMUI. SHE WOULDN'T LIE, WOULD SHE?

MAYBE THE LADY YAKO SAW WAS SOMEBODY ELSE.

BUT... WHAT IF IT REALLY WAS MISS SOPHIE?

RMBL

RM M BL

SKRT +1...

SKRT +1

SKRT +1

SKRT +1

SKRT +1

BLINK

SKRT +1

SKRT +1

NO WONDER SHE NEVER WANTS TO GET UP IN THE MORNING.

SHE'S STAYING UP LATE AGAIN?

SKRT +1

SKRT +1

SKRT +1

SKRT +1

HEY... WHAT'RE YOU-

SKRT +1

SKRT +1

SKRT +1

SKRT +1

SKRT +1

MY NECK ...

OHH, MY NECK ...!

SOPHIE! GET UP, ALREADY!

Morning!

OH, NO! DID YOU SLEEP ON IT WRONG?

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?!

MY NECK... IT'S GONE!

PFFT!

HEY! THAT REMINDS ME... YOU WERE UP REALLY LATE LAST NIGHT, WEREN'T YOU?

I GOT YOU GOOD!

AHH. WHEN IT'S THIS EASY TO MAKE YOU LAUGH, HOW CAN I EVER STOP?

YOU BETTER STOP THAT, YOU KNOW?

THIS IS WHY YOU HAVE SUCH A HARD TIME WAKING UP.

DID YOU SEE?

HEY, SOPHIE...?

AH.

WELL, IT'S JUST A BIT OF EXTRA STUDYING. I GOTTA DO WHAT I CAN TO KEEP UP WITH YOU KIDS.

I COULDN'T TELL WHAT IT WAS YOU WERE WRITING.

HUH?

NO. NOT REALLY.

I WONDER IF I HAVE AN EVIL TWIN.

HOW SPOOKY!

SHE SAID SHE HAD A NEIGHBOR WHO LOOKED EXACTLY LIKE YOU.

ONE OF THE OTHER TRAINEES WHO GREW UP HERE IN AFTZAAK...

THIS WILL DO.

Hrmmmmm...

Hrmmm...

Hrmm...

IT'S LIKE THAT TIME MY MOM TRIED TO EAT A WHOLE BOX OF CELINES IN SECRET!

THIS IS HOW GROWN-UPS ACT WHEN THEY'RE HIDING SOME-THING.

See you!

I'VE SEEN THIS KINDA THING BEFORE.

THANKS FOR LETTING ME BORROW THE BOOK! IT WAS SUPER INTERESTING!

GLAD TO HEAR IT.

* CELINE: A FIG-BASED, LIQUEUR-INFUSED CONFECTION

KA-CHAK

CREEEAK

"WHY WOULD ANYONE SUDDENLY GET A JOB AT HER AGE?"

YAKO'S GOT A GOOD POINT.

SWP 24

OH! IT'S PRO-FESSOR EDAN!

AND SHE'S TALKING TO-

IT'S MISS SOPHIE!

TO TELL THE TRUTH, MY CHILDREN CAN'T GET ENOUGH OF IT.

REALLY? THAT'S SO IMPRES-SIVE!

ANYWAY, THANK YOU FOR THE CHAT! TAKE CARE!

?

You scared me!

EEEEEP!

PROFESSOR EDAN'S ON HER EIGHTEENTH YEAR AT THE LIBRARY. SHE'S THIRTY-TWO!

MISS SOPHIE, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS THIRTY-FIVE!

WHEN YA WANNA TALK KAFNA, WHO'S THE GAL TO CALL? PEPERICO!

TO THE RESCUE!

WOW. SO THAT MEANS SHE'S OLDER.

HM?

BLAB BUT IN CASE YOU'RE WONDERING, PROFESSOR EDAN LOVES BAKING SWEETS. SHE'S GOT *TWO* RASCALLY RUG RATS WITH HER HYRON HUBBY, WHO'S AN EDITOR AT ONE OF THE CITY'S MONTHLY MAGAZINES.

BLAB THEY GOT TO KNOW EACH OTHER THANKS TO ONE OF PROFESSOR EDAN'S FELLOW TRAINEES, WHO SET THEM UP ON A DATE!

BLAB

SHE'S OLDER THAN PROFESSOR EDAN..!?

OOPSIE-TULIP. SORRY 'BOUT THAT.

SHHH! QUIET!!

MISS SOPHIE WILL HEAR YOU! SHE'S RIGHT OUTSIDE!!

WHAT ABOUT HER IS OLDER?!

HM. GOOD POINT. MISS SOPHIE IS OLDER, AFTER ALL.

PROFESSOR EDAN'S VERY RESPECTFUL TOWARD MISS SOPHIE, HUH? BUT WHAT'S SO STRANGE ABOUT THAT?

Score! Deets on Edan x Sophie!

MM-HM... I SEE... FASCI-NATING.

WRITIN' IT DOWN!

BLAB BLAB BLAB

IF YA WANNA KNOW ANY SPECIFICS, I'M *DYIN'* FOR YOU TO ASK!

WELL, ACTU-ALLY...

THERE IS *ONE* THING...

OH, IT'S *SOMETHING*, ALL RIGHT!

MAYBE I'M GETTING ALL WORKED UP OVER NOTHING.

METT'S MY ROOM-MATE.

HEY! IT'S NOT POLITE TO EAVES-DROP!

I WAS EAVES-DROP-PING.

UM... YOU'RE THE ONE WHO'S HIDING IN *MY* DORM ROOM.

A THREE-YEAR DIFFERENCE IN AGE, AND SHE'S TREAT-ING HER PUPIL LIKE A *VIP*? NUH-UH! SOME-THING DOESN'T ADD UP.

SURE, PROFESSOR EDAN'S NOT THE *HEAD* SUPERVISOR, BUT SHE'S STILL OUR TEACHER.

SOMEONE CHECKING UP ON HOW WE ACT WHEN THE PROFES-SORS AREN'T AROUND!

A MOLE AMONG THE TRAIN-EES!

STRANGE WE DIDN'T HAVE *WHAT*?

NOW I'M MORE CERTAIN THAN EVER.

YOU KNOW, I THOUGHT IT WAS STRANGE WE DIDN'T HAVE ONE.

EVALUA-TIONS OF US, NO DOUBT!

SOME-TIMES I CATCH HER WRITING STUFF LATE AT NIGHT!

...IS AC-TUALLY ONE OF OUR SENIOR SUPERVI-SORS!

AND IF I'M RIGHT, WHICH I MOST DEFINITELY AM, THEN SOPHIE SCHWIMM...

THAT'S SILLY. THERE'S NO WAY MISS SOPHIE–

PFFT!

I'M ON THE CA-

YOUR MISSION IS TO FIND OUT WHAT'S IN THAT DESK!

WAIT! WHAT?!

INSPECTOR TUTULL!

WELL, THERE'S AN EASY WAY TO FIND OUT.

YES, MA'AM!

WHOA, WHOA, WHOA.

NOW YOU'RE JUST GRASPING AT STRAWS.

ADMIT IT.

SHF

WOULDN'T YOU LIKE TO BORROW... *THIS?*

WHAT IF I SWEETEN THE DEAL?

Hmm?

KLUNK

QUIT TRYING TO GET THE KID TO DO YOUR DIRTY WORK.

IT'S NOT NICE TO GO DIGGING THROUGH OTHER PEOPLE'S THINGS!

AND IF MISS SOPHIE FOUND OUT, SHE'D PROBABLY GET REALLY MAD!

HMHM!

YOU DON'T *KNOW* ?!

HE'S ONLY ONE OF THE FOUR GREATEST LITERARY MINDS OF OUR TIME!

MOIAH? WHO'S THAT?

NO WAY! MOIAH'S LATEST VOL-UME?!

AND TAWALS MANU, THE TITAN OF THE MODERN NOVEL, WHO'S HAD MORE WORKS ADAPTED TO THE STAGE...

...THAN YOU COULD CARRY IN BOTH ARMS!

CUDOT-VOREC ILLEYAD, THE SORCERER OF WORDS WHOSE FICTION FOR KIDS...

...STILL CAPTIVATES THE MINDS OF ADULTS!

HIRO BENI, THE "MAGUS OF METAPHOR," WHOSE PROSE LEAVES YOU FROZEN...

...LIKE YOU'RE STARING INTO THE ABYSS!

GARRAF MOIAH, THE FEISTY YOUNG GENIUS WHOSE SUDDEN APPEARANCE...

...TOOK THE LITERARY WORLD BY STORM!

THIS NEWS TO YOU, TOO?

I DON'T READ LIT MAGAZINES. OR *ANY* MAGAZINES.

SHINGEI-BUNJU MONTHLY NAMED THEM THE FOUR WRITERS THAT DEFINE THE WORLD OF MODERN LITERATURE!

ALL RIGHT. ARE YOU GONNA GO FIND OUT WHAT SHE WAS WRITING?

NOD

NOD

NOD

WHAT A WICKED USE OF A BOOK...

You want it, girl? Yeah?

SO WHATCHA HAVE THAT BOOK FOR, THEN?

I DECIDED IT MIGHT BE SMART TO HAVE A COMMODITY OR TWO ON HAND FOR TIMES I MIGHT NEED TO PROCURE A FAVOR.

YES, PLEASE!

PRETTY PLEASE!

You wouldn't believe how long I stood in line for this.

THAT'S... ALMOST REFRESH-INGLY UNDER-HANDED.

I'M GONNA WHEEDLE MY WAY STRAIGHT INTO THE GUIDANCE OFFICE!

IF WE'RE *SURE*, WE CAN START BUTTER-ING HER UP FOR POINTS!

ISN'T IT OBVI-OUS?!

FOR THE SAKE OF ARGUMENT, LET'S ASSUME WE DO FIND OUT SHE'S SPYING ON US. WHAT EXACTLY DO WE GAIN FROM KNOWING?

GO, MY LOYAL TUT-ULL!

BRING US THE TRUTH OF SOPHIE SCHWIMM!

SHRF

GULP...

GRIP

KLUNK

NO! I CAN'T !!

AND IF I DO IT FOR THE CHANCE TO READ THAT MOIAH NOVEL, I'LL PROBABLY FEEL SO GUILTY, I'LL END UP HATING THE BOOK.

IT'S NOT RIGHT! I SHOULDN'T GO DIGGING THROUGH SOMEONE ELSE'S STUFF.

CREAK

IT'S JUST NOT RIGHT...

I...

I DIDN'T PEEK! I PROM-ISE!

GAHHHHH!!

I KNOW WHAT YOU DID.

BUT... I REALLY DIDN'T...

I... I...

I SWEAR I DIDN'T PEEEEEK!

WAH HH HH

I KNOW. I SAW THE WHOLE THING.

SHF ス ooo

AND GOING BY YOUR REAC-TION...

...I'M GUESSING THIS WASN'T *YOUR* IDEA TO BEGIN WITH.

ERP.

NGH...

MRMM ...!

NO... IF THERE'S ANYONE WHO WOULD PUT YOU UP TO THIS, MY GUESS IS MISS NANAU.

I CAN'T IMAGINE THIS SORT OF BEHAVIOR FROM ANY OF OUR FRIENDS IN THE POP LIT APPRECIATION CLUB.

IN A WAY, I GUESS THAT'S VERY COMMENDABLE.

YOU DON'T SNEAK PEEKS, AND YOU DON'T RAT OUT ACCOMPLICES, HM?

NO! I'M NOT A TATTLE-TALE!

I'D KEPT QUIET ABOUT THIS BECAUSE IT'S HONESTLY A BIT EMBARRASSING, BUT...

SO BE IT.

IS...

IS THIS WHAT I THINK IT IS?!

SEEING AS YOU'RE SUCH A GOOD GIRL, I'LL LET YOU IN ON MY SECRET.

MY LATE-NIGHT WRITING SESSIONS? TAKE A LOOK.

HOW COULD I NOT READ IT?!

WHAT DID YOU THINK?!

HAVE YOU READ IT, TOO?!

AND THAT ONE PART ...!

MORN-ING!

OHHH...

PROBABLY THE ONE MISS SOPHIE'S WRITING.

EVERYBODY'S TALKING ABOUT SOME KIND OF NOVEL. DO YOU KNOW ANY-THING?!

MORNING, OHGGA!

HOWDY-HO, THEO!

BUT, UM...

SURE! MADHA AND I READ IT SIDE BY SIDE!

DID YOU GET TO SEE IT?!

YUP!

THE MANUSCRIPT CIRCLED THE GIRLS' DORM ROOMS LAST NIGHT.

MISS SOPHIE IS WRITING A NOVEL ?!

IT'S CER-TAINLY... *INVENTIVE.*

MORE LIKE *INCOHER-ENT.*

ABSOLUTELY POINTLESS. I'D LIKE A REFUND FOR MY TIME.

HOW DO I PUT THIS...?

I WAS TOTALLY LOST!!

IT SEEMS HIGH SCORES ON THE KAFNA EXAM DON'T NECESSARILY REFLECT SKILL AT STORY-TELLING.

I also read it. Just in case.

IT KINDA WENT OVER MY HEAD.

...

さわ.. WHSPR

MAYBE SHE'S SOME KIND OF SUPER GENIUS!

I *TOLD* YOU SHE WAS A WEIRDO!

さわ.. WHSPR

WHSPR さわ..

N...

NOW I REALLY WANT TO READ THIS NOVEL...

THANKS SO MUCH FOR SHARING!

KNOCK YOURSELF OUT.

WELL, IT'S MORE LIKE A NOVELLA...

...BUT IN ANY CASE, IT'S MY FIRST-EVER CHANCE TO READ A BOOK WRITTEN BY A FRIEND!

AN ACTUAL HANDWRITTEN MANUSCRIPT FOR A NOVEL...!

WOW...

HEH... LISTEN TO ME...

...GOING ON LIKE I'M QUALIFIED TO GIVE CRITIQUE...

...BUT I LOVE NOVELS. I'M PRETTY SURE I CAN PICK OUT WHAT SHE WAS GOING FOR, EVEN IF IT ISN'T VERY POLISHED YET.

EVERYONE ELSE SEEMED KINDA PERPLEXED...








MISS SOPHIE ...?
I CAN'T BELIEVE IT.
YOUR STORY ...


FFFF...

I CAN'T MAKE HEADS OR TAILS OF IT!

AND YET... IT'S *CAPTIVATING!*

AND WHEN HER BODY SUDDENLY DOUBLED IN SIZE, WHAT WERE YOU TRYING TO *SAY?!*

AND THE HERO, KOGOTO... WHY WAS SHE SO PREOCCUPIED WITH THE CLOD OF DIRT ON THE SOLE OF HER SHOE? WHAT DOES IT *MEAN?*

AND I CAN'T FOR THE LIFE OF ME FIGURE OUT WHAT THE TOWN POPULATED ENTIRELY BY EYE DOCTORS REPRESENTS!

LIKE... THE *NOSE-SELLER* GIRL. I CAN'T EVEN BEGIN TO IMAGINE WHAT SHE LOOKS LIKE!

THE WORLD IS UNLIKE ANYTHING I'VE EVER READ. THE WAY THE PLOT DEVELOPS IS MYSTE-RIOUS...

...YET THE CHARACTERS' FEELINGS AND ACTIONS FEEL SO HONEST AND REAL.

BUT THE THING IS... IT'S NOT THAT THE WRITING'S SLOPPY, OR THAT THE STORY ISN'T WELL THOUGHT OUT.

NO TRADITIONAL NARRATIVE ARC.

NO FORE-SHADOWING. NO METAPHOR THAT I CAN SPOT.

IT'S SO THOROUGHLY... *ILLOGICAL.*

THE MORE I TRY TO APPLY THE STANDARD RULES OF WRITING, THE MORE IT SEEMS TO TOY WITH MY MIND.

YOU DIDN'T WRITE THIS HAPHAZ-ARDLY.

YOU PLANNED THIS STORY OUT DELIBERATELY, EVERY STEP OF THE WAY.

AT FIRST GLANCE, IT'S LIKE A FEVER DREAM THAT'S ONLY GOING TO GET MORE ABSURD AS TIME GOES ON, BUT THEN THE STORY REACHES OUT AND GENTLY LEADS YOU BY THE HAND.

IT'S ALMOST AS IF THE FACT THAT IT'S ILLOGICAL IS THE WHOLE POINT. YOU'RE BEING SHOWN WHAT IT IS TO NOT UNDERSTAND.

SORRY. IT'S NOT LIKE I'M CAPABLE ENOUGH TO JUDGE OTHERS' WRITING.

HUH ?!

NO, I MEAN... IT'S JUST A HOBBY!

WELL, THEO...

I CAN SEE YOU'RE VERY FOND OF NOVELS.

R-REALLY? 'CAUSE IT SURE DIDN'T *READ* LIKE THAT...

BUT YOU REALLY DO IT TOO MUCH HONOR. IT'S JUST A LITTLE STORY I SLAPPED TO-GETHER.

NO, NO. I'M QUITE FLAT-TERED BY HOW MUCH THOUGHT YOU PUT INTO IT.

I KNOW I RECOGNIZE IT...

...I JUST CAN'T PUT MY FINGER ON WHO.

MAYBE IT'S WHATEVER AUTHOR SHE'S BEEN READING LATELY, SEEPING INTO HER WORK.

IT SEEMS VERY FAMILIAR.

IN ANY CASE, THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT THE PROSE, TOO...

I'M REALLY SORRY, MISS SOPHIE!

IT'S JUST THAT THE STORY WAS SO COOL, I HAD TO SHARE!

I BET WITH A FEW ILLUSTRATIONS, IT WOULD GO OVER BETTER WITH THE OTHER TRAINEES.

YEAH. AND A STORY WHERE LOGIC DOESN'T HOLD IS A TOUGH SELL TO A GROUP LIKE OURS.

IT WOULD FEEL PRETTY ECCENTRIC TO SOMEONE WHO DOESN'T READ MUCH FICTION.

PROM-ISE YOU WON'T STOP WRIT-ING?

IT'S ALL RIGHT, TUTULL... I'M JUST GLAD YOU ENJOYED IT.

RUMORS?

AND IF *YOU* CAN WRITE A NOVEL THIS CAPTIVATING, MISS SOPHIE, IT KINDA MAKES ME WONDER IF THE RUMORS MIGHT BE TRUE.

I MEAN, EVEN YOUNG CHILDREN WOULD HAVE TROUBLE WRITING SOMETHING AS OUTLANDISH AS THIS!

YEAH, IT'S GREAT!

BUT IT'S GOT SO MANY COOL IDEAS!

IT'S GOT ME WONDERING ALL OVER AGAIN HOW IN THE WORLD YOUR MIND EVEN WORKS.

THAT'S A *COMPLI-MENT*, RIGHT?

THEY SAY THAT WHEN IT COMES TO THE WORLD OF NOVEL-ISTS...

...IT'S ACTUALLY NOT ALL MEN. THERE ARE A LOT OF WOMEN, TOO!

THAT'S THE STORY, ANY-WAY.

AND BE-FORE SHE BECAME AN AUTHOR, SHE WAS JUST A REGULAR HOUSE-WIFE!

ACTU-ALLY, TEMOC MIGHT BE A *SHE*.

EXACTLY!

BECAUSE IT'S A *PEN NAME!*

BUT THE NAME SOUNDS SO–

YOU KNOW CUAD TEMOC, RIGHT?

SURE. HE WROTE THE BOOK *SYNTH-SPIRITS*.

I IMAGINE THEY DECIDE TO GO BY OTHER NAMES BECAUSE THEY KNOW THAT A BOOK BY A WOMAN WOULD NEVER SELL.

BINGO!

OH, I GET IT!

AND THE READERS ONLY SEE THE NAMES, SO THEY NEVER KNOW!

STOP SAYING THAT!

EXCUSE ME. I HAVE TO GO TO THE LADIES' ROOM TO TAKE A DUMP.

HM. GOOD POINT. FOR ALL THEIR COMPLAINING, IT'S TRUE THAT EVERYBODY WHO READ IT KEPT GOING ALL THE WAY TO THE END.

MY IMPRESSION IS THAT SHE'S MORE CONCERNED ABOUT *FEELING* THAN *LOGIC*.

IF YOU ASK ME...

A STORY LIKE *THAT*?

...EVERYTHING ABOUT HER STORY WAS VERY CAREFULLY CRAFTED.

EXACTLY.

IF THAT WAS ON PURPOSE, THIS MIGHT BE A WORK OF GENIUS.

?

UM... IT'S THE STORY WE'VE ALL JUST READ. THAT'S WHAT SHE'S BEEN WORKING ON.

OOH. SO SHE'S STILL AT IT? WHAT'S SHE WRITING NOW?

SOME NEW MASTER-PIECE?

WELL, IT'S GREAT SHE CAN WRITE AN ENGAG-ING STORY AND ALL.

BUT IT DOESN'T EXCUSE THE WAY SHE STAYS UP ALL NIGHT.

GOING BY THE COLOR OF THE INK ON THESE PAGES, SHE MUST'VE WRITTEN IT BEFORE SHE STARTED LIFE AS A TRAINEE.

IT'S A DREAM TO WRITE WITH. SUPER FLUID ON THE PAGE. BUT IT HAS A BAD TENDENCY TO BROWN WITH AGE.

I'M PRETTY SURE THE INK MISS SOPHIE LIKES TO USE IS KOMURA INK.

MM...

THAT CAN'T BE RIGHT. THERE'S NO WAY THIS WAS WRITTEN RECENTLY.

HUH?!

OH, WELL.

TA-DAH! CAST YOUR EYES ON THIS!

THE LATEST RELEASE FROM NONE OTHER THAN MOIAH HIMSELF!

WAY TO GO, TU-TULL!

MISS SOPHIE IS MISS SOPHIE, AND NOTHING WILL CHANGE THAT.

NO WAY!

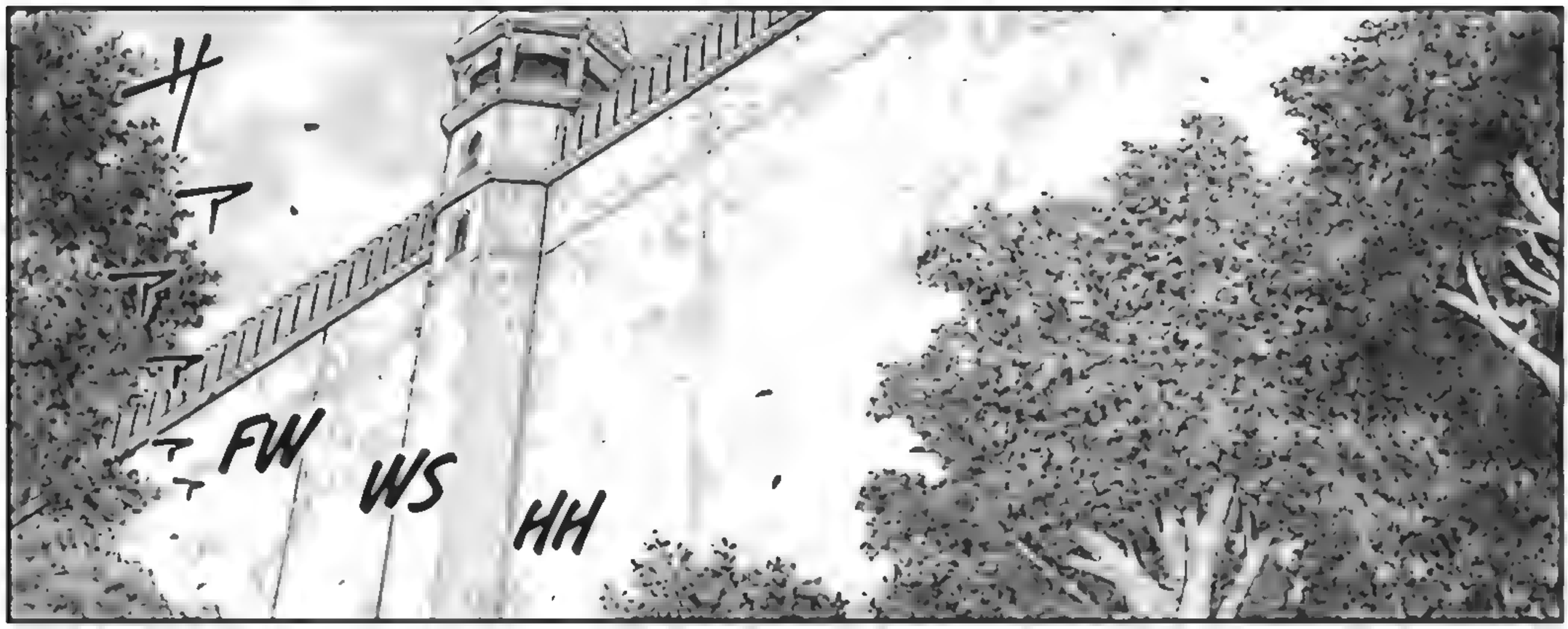
I NEVER DID LEARN THE TRUTH ABOUT WHERE SHE'S FROM AND WHY PROFES-SOR EDAN LOOKS UP TO HER.

SPEAKING OF WHICH...

OR MAYBE SHE'S JUST REVIEWING OUR STUD-IES?

I mean, she is a kafna now...

WOW! SO SHE'S WRITING SOMETHING NEW?!


FW
WS
HH




HEH.
WHAT'S NEXT? DEAD DROPS IN THE PARK?
SHF

GIVE THEM A LOOK, WOULD YOU?

BY THE WAY, WE GOT THE ILLUSTRATIONS FOR THE UPCOMING VOLUME.

NOW YOU'RE IN THE CENTRAL LIBRARY, TRYING OUT LIFE AS A KAFNA. I NEVER KNOW WHERE I'LL FIND YOU NEXT.

FLICK

A YEAR AGO YOU WERE RECOVERING FROM SCURVY AFTER INSISTING ON RECREATING THE DIET OF SOME ANCIENT SAILOR.

PERFECT. THEY'RE AS LOVELY AS EVER.

RIGHT, RIGHT. EDAN MENTIONED HIS WIFE'S ON STAFF THIS YEAR.

FWSHH

OF COURSE. A NUMBER OF THE SUPERVISORS ARE AWARE, THOUGH.

SHF SHF

OOPS.

YOU'RE KEEPING A LOW PROFILE AMONG THE TRAINEES, I HOPE?

IN ANY CASE...

...AS LONG AS THE WORDS KEEP FLOWING, I GUESS IT DOESN'T MATTER TO ME.

IS THAT A FACT?

WON'T HAPPEN. KAFNA HOPEFULS AREN'T KNOWN FOR THEIR LOVE OF POPULAR LITERATURE.

WELL, STAY ON YOUR TOES. IT'D BE CHAOS FOR US BOTH IF WORD GOT OUT.

KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK...

...MASTER ILLEYAD.



To be continued.

SERIES TERMINOLOGY

THE CREYAK

ORIGINS

The Creyak find their beginnings in a group of ancient tribes known collectively as the Kayyug, which once populated the region of Guna'an in the northernmost reaches of the continent. For generations, these tribes—characterized by the presence of large, triangular ears atop the head—warred among themselves with little outside contact. Their fate took a dramatic turn when a Rakta trade envoy encountered the Racc tribe and offered weapons in exchange for pick of the tribe's strongest laborers. Newly armed, the Racc soon dominated their home region, after which they directed a steady stream of defeated kin to the Rakta to secure additional goods. When the Rakta asked after the identity of these other tribes, the Racc chieftain responded, "What care I to know their names? We call them the Creyak: the neighboring brutes."

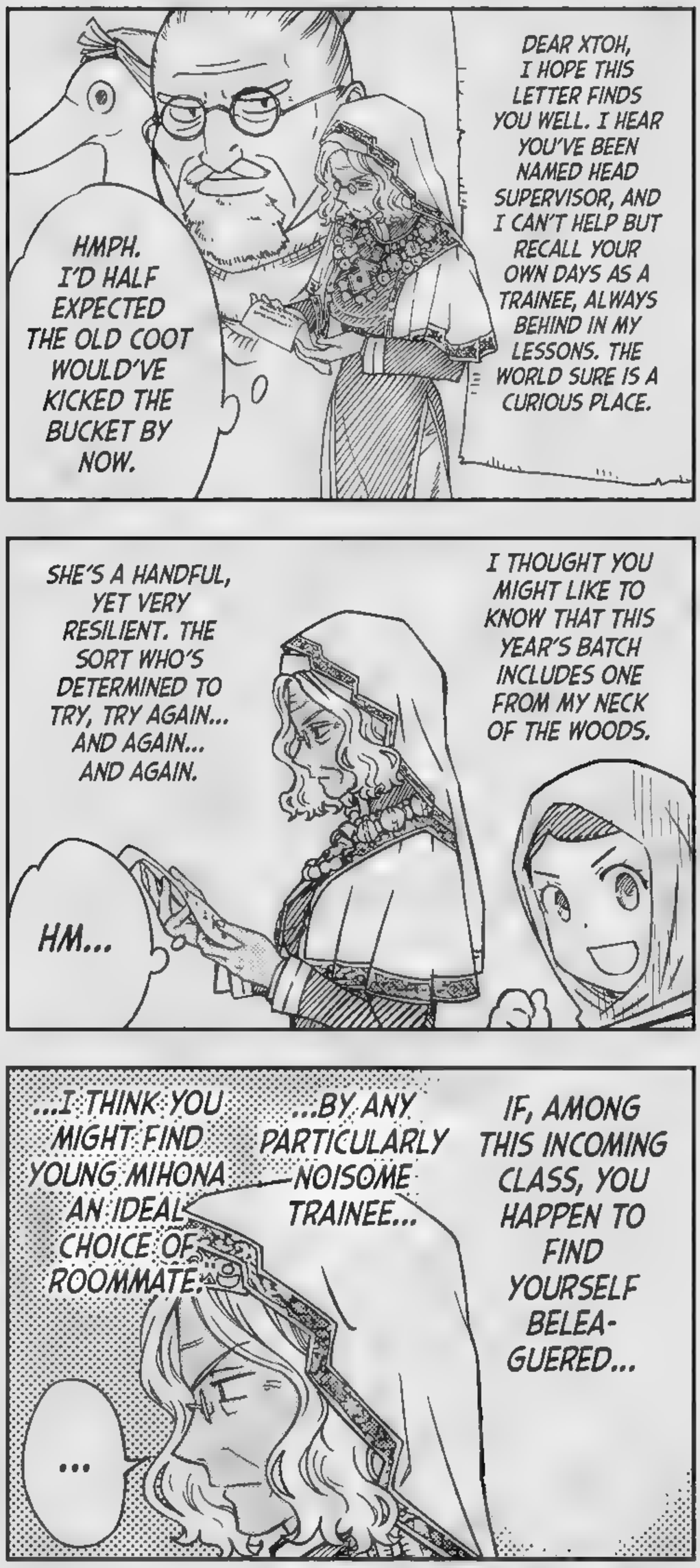
ERA OF ENSLAVEMENT

The Kayyug peoples carried off to Rakta lands would ultimately intermingle, forming a unique culture and claiming the Creyak moniker for their own. As the strength of Rakta civilization began to wane, anti-slavery sentiment gained traction, primarily among Rakta coastal cities. Eventually, Manacchan High Priest Greyble d'Verbois and prominent mayor Minato Tokiwa would join hands and lead a vocal push for emancipation. This movement was violently opposed by inland Rakta, ultimately sparking war.

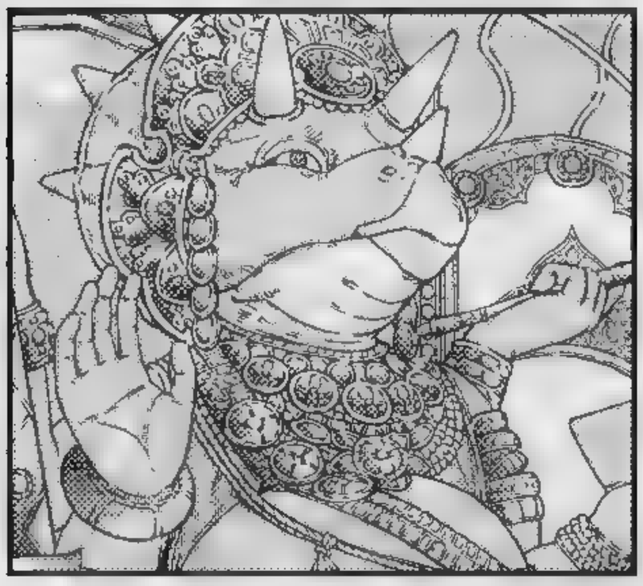
FOLLOWING EMANCIPATION

The War on Land and Sea had hardly subsided when the continent was forced to grapple with the arrival of the Emissary of Wormwood. In response to this new threat, the Creyak dispatched the Magus of the Mines, whose role in defeating the calamity would earn his people sufficient sway to carve out its own autonomous region. The remaining Kayyug tribes, among them the Racc, sought refuge with their long-lost brethren, only for a new issue to emerge. The Creyak, who had spent generations alongside the Rakta at the forefront of continental civilization, now saw their Kayyug kin as barbaric. In exchange for succor, tribes were subjugated and forced to adapt the Creyak way of life. Thus, the Kayyug's long struggle seems set to continue for some time hence.

ASSIGNING ROOMMATES I

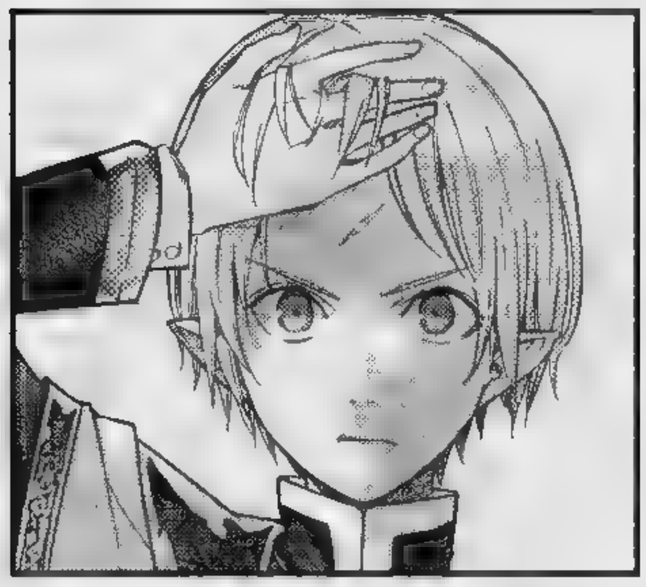


POINTS OF INTEREST IN EACH CHAPTER



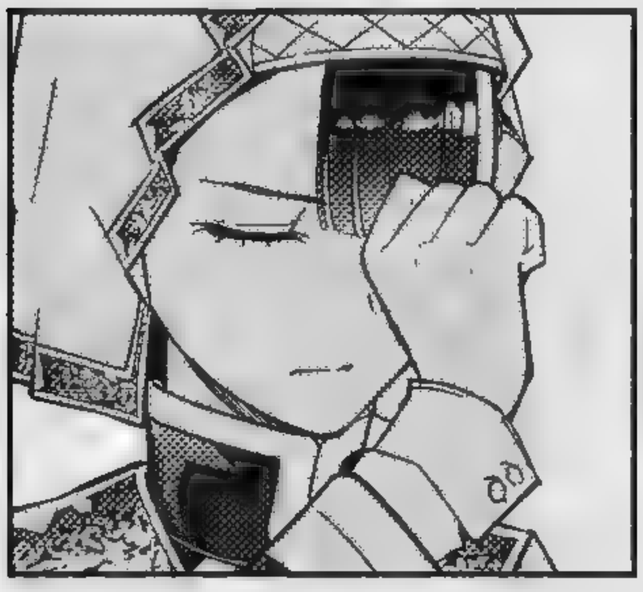
CHAPTER 25: GOD IN THE ASIN RELIGION

Known as Viracocha, this deity is depicted with four upper limbs. The lower left hand supports a trapezoidal pedestal said to be the platform that will elevate the Hyron people to greatness. (It also serves as a general symbol for Asin.) Clutched in Viracocha's upper right hand is a sword to exorcise the land of its spirits. The upper left holds a slender pipe with which the deity draws in misfortune and exhales blessings.



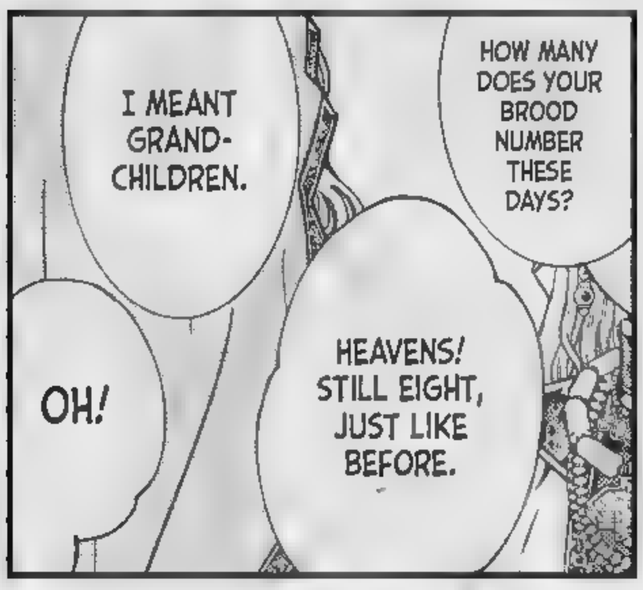
CHAPTER 26: THE OLD SCAR ON THEO'S FOREHEAD

When Theo focuses his powers, the scar on his forehead tends to glow. This is a natural consequence from a buildup in pressure of the mana constantly flowing through his body; as pressure mounts, trace amounts of mana leak through the weakened tissue.



CHAPTER 27: PRAYER

In Manaccha, prayers are offered with the head slightly bowed and the right fist positioned near the forehead with knuckles upward. The devout typically pray at the beginning of the day, the end of the day, and before or after meals, expressing their thanks to the spirits and to the land.



CHAPTER 28: ANZU'S CHILDREN

Numerous members of House Kavishmaf populate the ranks of the Central Library, with one each currently serving in the General Affairs Office, the Judicial Office, the Liaisons Office, and the current class of trainees.



CHAPTER 29: EXPRESSIONS OF DELIGHT

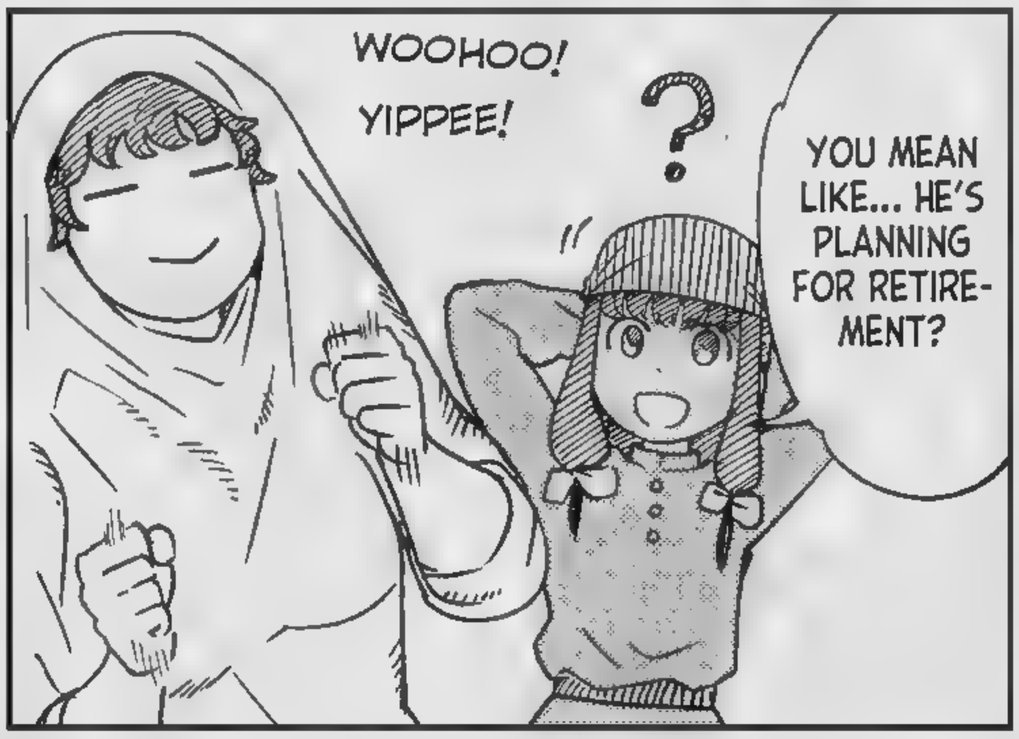
It's likely there isn't a child on the continent who hasn't at one point struck this pose—at least among those whose families have regular access to books. It is an homage to a particularly beloved illustration in the celebrated work of juvenile fiction, Tsitzy's Adventures in Glitterland, *by Xulc M'aha.*

ASSIGNING ROOMMATES II

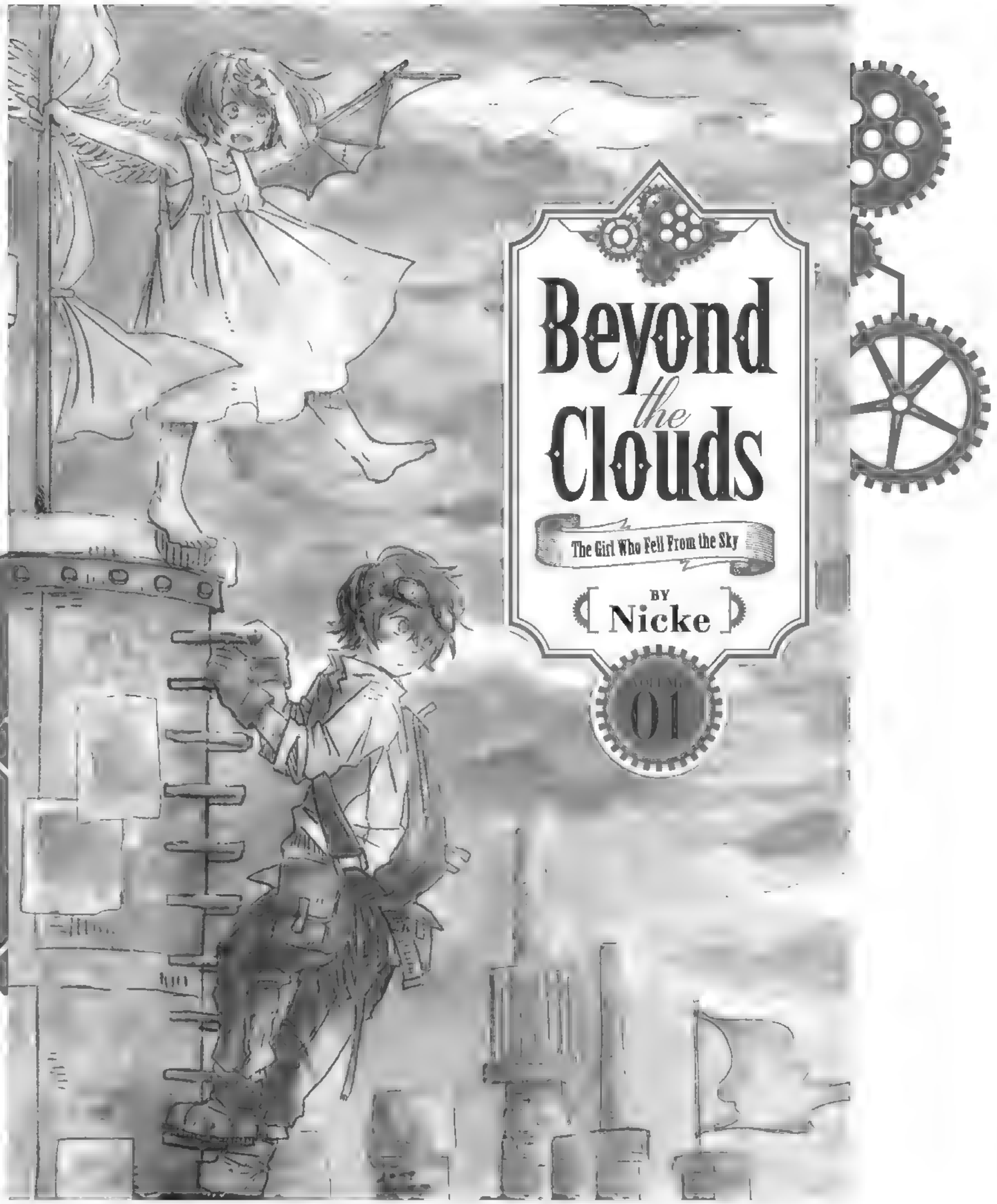








Young characters and steampunk setting, like *Howl's Moving Castle* and *Battle Angel Alita*



Beyond the Clouds © 2018 Nicke / Ki-oon

A boy with a talent for machines and a mysterious girl whose wings he's fixed will take you beyond the clouds! In the tradition of the high-flying, resonant adventure stories of Studio Ghibli comes a gorgeous tale about the longing of young hearts for adventure and friendship!

One of CLAMP's biggest hits returns in this definitive, premium, hardcover 20th anniversary collector's edition!



"A wonderfully entertaining story that would be a great installment in anybody's manga collection."
— Anime News Network

"CLAMP is an all-female manga-creating team whose feminine touch shows in this entertaining, sci-fi soap opera."
— Publishers Weekly

Chobits © CLAMP·ShigatsuTsuitachi CO.,LTD./Kodansha Ltd.

Poor college student Hideki is down on his luck. All he wants is a good job, a girlfriend, and his very own "persocom"—the latest and greatest in humanoid computer technology. Hideki's luck changes one night when he finds Chi—a persocom thrown out in a pile of trash. But Hideki soon discovers that there's much more to his cute new persocom than meets the eye.

KC KODANSHA COMICS



Knight of the Ice ©Yayoi Ogawa/Kodansha Ltd

SKATING THRILLS AND ICY CHILLS WITH THIS NEW TINGLY ROMANCE SERIES!

A rom-com on ice, perfect for fans of *Princess Jellyfish* and *Wotakoi*. Kokoro is the talk of the figure-skating world, winning trophies and hearts. But little do they know... he's actually a huge nerd! From the beloved creator of *You're My Pet* (*Tramps Like Us*).

Chitose is a serious young woman, working for the health magazine *SASSO*. Or at least, she would be, if she wasn't constantly getting distracted by her childhood friend, international figure skating star Kokoro Kijinami! In the public eye and on the ice, Kokoro is a gallant, flawless knight, but behind his glittery costumes and breathtaking spins lies a secret: He's actually a hopelessly romantic otaku, who can only land his quad jumps when Chitose is on hand to recite a spell from his favorite magical girl anime!



KC KODANSHA COMICS

A SMART, NEW ROMANTIC COMEDY FOR FANS OF *SHORTCAKE CAKE* AND *TERRACE HOUSE*!



Living-Room Matsunaga-san © Keiko Iwashita / Kodansha Ltd

KC KODANSHA COMICS

A romance manga starring high school girl Meeko, who learns to live on her own in a boarding house whose living room is home to the odd (but handsome) Matsunaga-san. She begins to adjust to her new life away from her parents, but Meeko soon learns that no matter how far away from home she is, she's still a young girl at heart — especially when she finds herself falling for Matsunaga-san.

PERFECT WORLD

Rie Aruga



An office party reunites Tsugumi with her high school crush Itsuki. He's realized his dream of becoming an architect, but along the way, he experienced a spinal injury that put him in a wheelchair. Now Tsugumi's rekindled feelings will butt up against prejudices she never considered — and Itsuki will have to decide if he's ready to let someone into his heart...

"Depicts with great delicacy and courage the difficulties some with disabilities experience getting involved in romantic relationships... Rie Aruga refuses to romanticize, pushing her heroine to face the reality of disability. She invites her readers to the same tasks of empathy, knowledge and recognition."
—Slate.fr

"An important entry [in manga romance]... The emotional core of both plot and characters indicates thoughtfulness... [Aruga's] research is readily apparent in the text and artwork, making this feel like a real story."
—Anime News Network

Perfect World © Rie Aruga/Kodansha Ltd

KC KODANSHA COMICS

The boys are back, in 400-page hardcovers that are as pretty and badass as they are!



Saiyuki © Kazuya Minakura / Ichijinsha Inc.

KC KODANSHA COMICS

"AN EDGY COMIC LOOK AT AN ANCIENT CHINESE TALE." –YALSA

Genjo Sanzo is a Buddhist priest in the city of Togenkyo, which is being ravaged by yokai spirits that have fallen out of balance with the natural order. His superiors send him on a journey far to the west to discover why this is happening and how to stop it. His companions are three yokai with human souls. But this is no day trip — the four will encounter many discoveries and horrors on the way.

FEATURES NEW TRANSLATION, COLOR PAGES, AND BEAUTIFUL WRAPAROUND COVER ART!



Something's Wrong With Us

NATSUMI ANDO



The dark, psychological, sexy shojo series readers have been waiting for!

A spine-chilling and steamy romance between a Japanese sweets maker and the man who framed her mother for murder!

Following in her mother's footsteps, Nao became a traditional Japanese sweets maker, and with unparalleled artistry and a bright attitude, she gets an offer to work at a world-class confectionary company. But when she meets the young, handsome owner, she recognizes his cold stare...

Something's Wrong With Us © Natsumi Ando / Kodansha Ltd.

KC KODANSHA COMICS

The adorable new odd-couple cat comedy manga from the creator of the beloved *Chi's Sweet Home*, in full color!

Praise for *Chi's Sweet Home*

"Nearly impossible to turn away... a true all-ages title that anyone, young or old, cat lover or not, will enjoy. The stories will bring a smile to your face and warm your heart."

—School Library Journal



Sue & Tai-chan

Konami Kanata

Sue is an aging housecat who's looking forward to living out her life in peace... but her plans change when the mischievous black tomcat Tai-chan enters the picture! Hey! Sue never signed up to be a catsitter! *Sue & Tai-chan* is the latest from the reigning meow-narch of cute kitty comics, Konami Kanata.

Sue & Tai-chan © Konami Kanata/Kodansha Ltd.

KC KODANSHA COMICS

THE SWEET SCENT OF LOVE IS IN THE AIR! FOR FANS OF OFFBEAT ROMANCES LIKE *WOTAKOI*



Sweat and Soap © Kintetsu Yamada / Kodansha Ltd.

In an office romance, there's a fine line between sexy and awkward... and that line is where Asako — a woman who sweats copiously — meets Koutarou — a perfume developer who can't get enough of Asako's, er, scent. Don't miss a romcom manga like no other!

KC KODANSHA COMICS

CUTE ANIMALS AND LIFE LESSONS, PERFECT FOR ASPIRING PET VETS OF ALL AGES!



KC KODANSHA COMICS

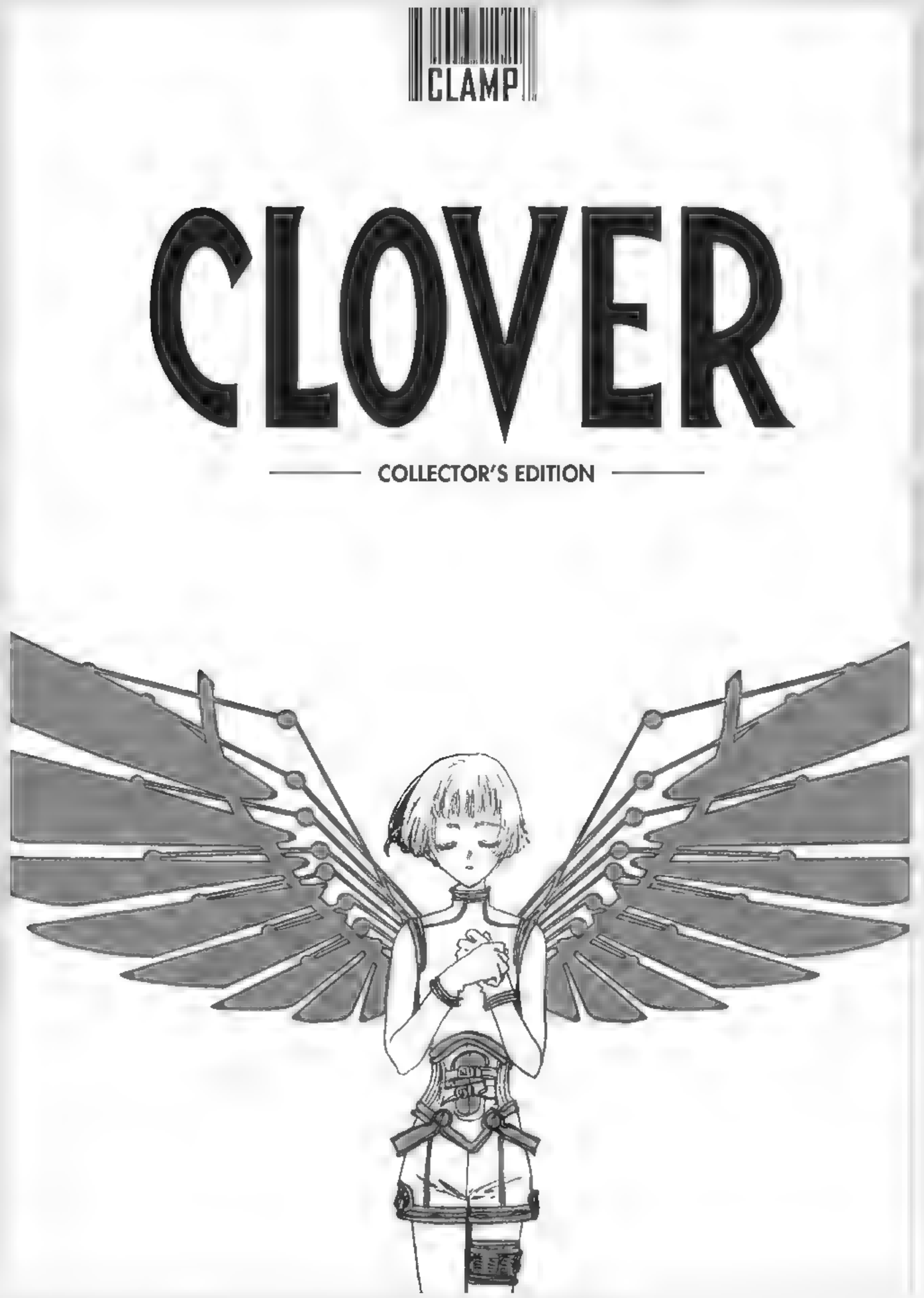
Yuzu the Pet Vet © Mingo Ito / NIPPON COLUMBIA CO., LTD. / Kodansha Ltd

For an 11-year-old, Yuzu has a lot on her plate. When her mom gets sick and has to be hospitalized, Yuzu goes to live with her uncle who runs the local veterinary clinic. Yuzu's always been scared of animals, but she tries to help out. Through all the tough moments in her life, Yuzu realizes that she can help make things all right with a little help from her animal pals, peers, and kind grown-ups.

Every new patient is a furry friend in the making!

The art-deco cyberpunk classic from the creators of *xxxHOLiC* and *Cardcaptor Sakura*!

"Starred Review. This experimental sci-fi work from CLAMP reads like a romantic version of *AKIRA*."
—Publishers Weekly

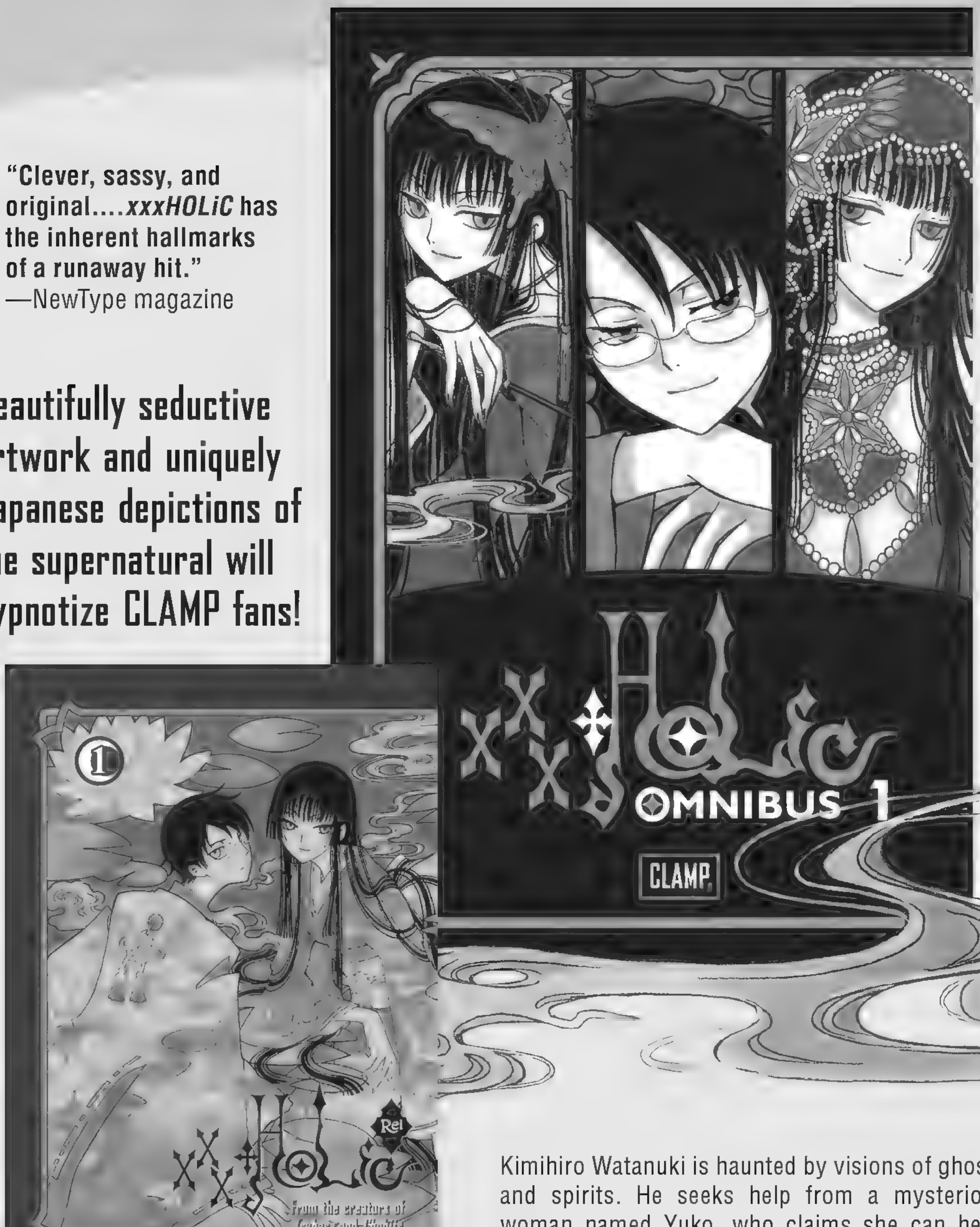


Su was born into a bleak future, where the government keeps tight control over children with magical powers—codenamed "Clovers." With Su being the only "four-leaf" Clover in the world, she has been kept isolated nearly her whole life. Can ex-military agent Kazuhiko deliver her to the happiness she seeks? Experience the complete series in this hardcover edition, which also includes over twenty pages of ravishing color art!

KC
KODANSHA COMICS

"Clever, sassy, and original....*xxxHOLiC* has the inherent hallmarks of a runaway hit."
—NewType magazine

Beautifully seductive artwork and uniquely Japanese depictions of the supernatural will hypnotize CLAMP fans!



Kimihiro Watanuki is haunted by visions of ghosts and spirits. He seeks help from a mysterious woman named Yuko, who claims she can help. However, Watanuki must work for Yuko in order to pay for her aid. Soon Watanuki finds himself employed in Yuko's shop, where he sees things and meets customers that are stranger than anything he could have ever imagined.

xxxHOLiC © CLAMP ShigatsuTsuitachi CO .LTD /Kodansha Ltd
xxxHOLiC Rei © CLAMP ShigatsuTsuitachi CO .LTD /Kodansha Ltd

KC KODANSHA COMICS

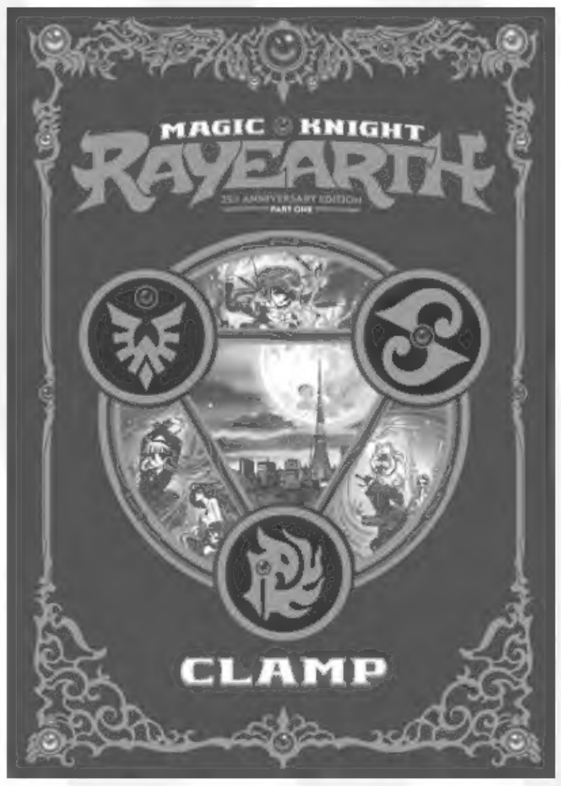
THE WORLD OF CLAMP!



Cardcaptor Sakura
Collector's Edition



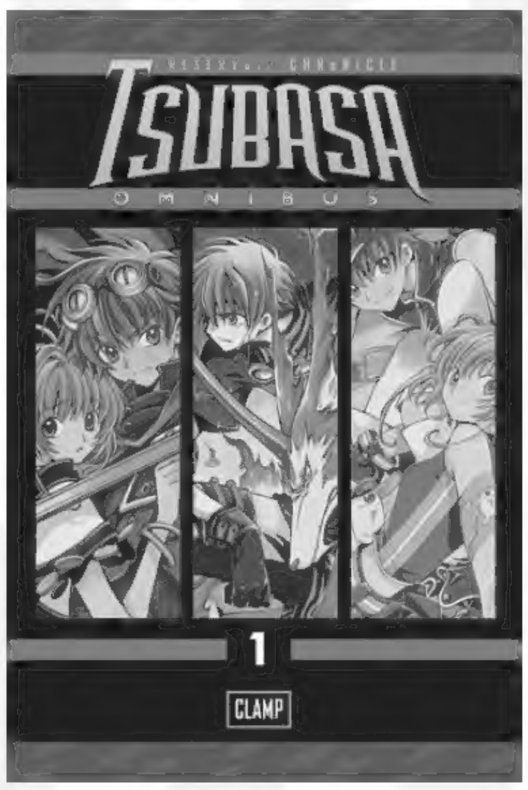
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TSUBASA Omnibus



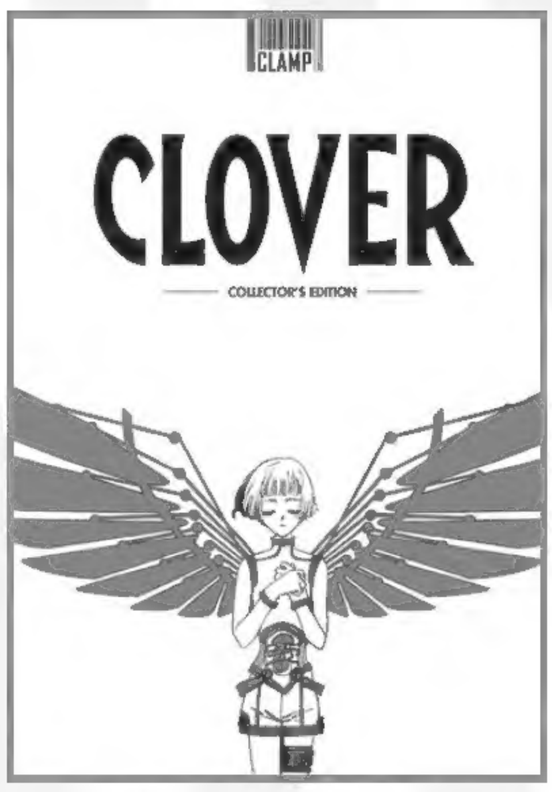
TSUBASA WoRLD CHRoNiCLE



xxxHOLiC Omnibus



xxxHOLiC Rei



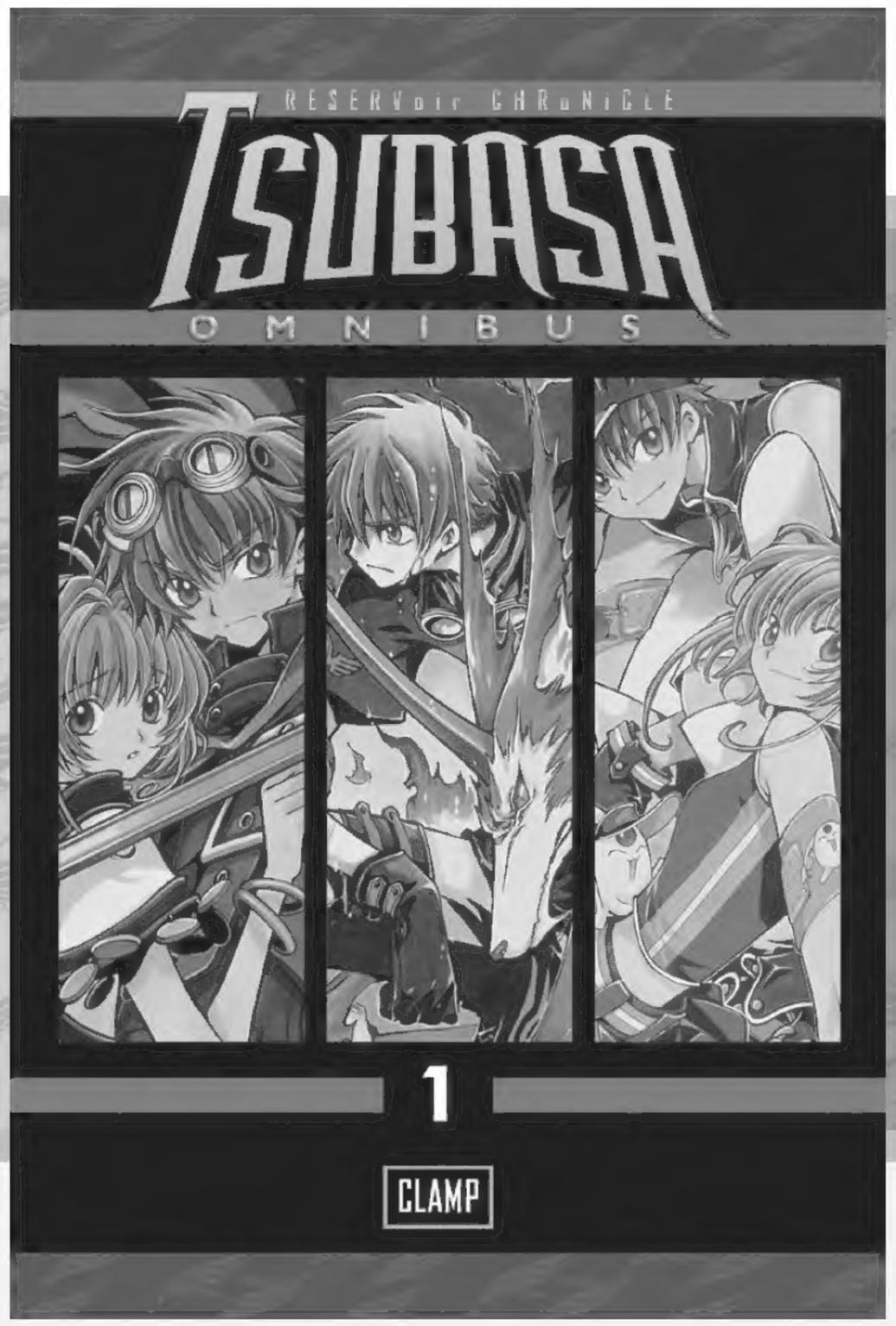
CLOVER Collector's Edition

KC KODANSHA COMICS

Kodansha Comics welcomes you to explore the expansive world of CLAMP, the all-female artist collective that has produced some of the most acclaimed manga of the century. Our growing catalog includes icons like *Cardcaptor Sakura* and *Magic Knight Rayearth*, each crafted with CLAMP's one-of-a-kind style and characters!

© CLAMP·ShigatsuTsuitachi CO.,LTD./Kodansha Ltd.

The beloved characters from *Cardcaptor Sakura* return in a brand new, reimagined fantasy adventure!





"[*Tsubasa*] takes readers on a fantastic ride that only gets more exhilarating with each successive chapter." —Anime News Network

In the Kingdom of Clow, an archaeological dig unleashes an incredible power, causing Princess Sakura to lose her memories. To save her, her childhood friend Syaoran must follow the orders of the Dimension Witch and travel alongside Kurogane, an unrivaled warrior; Fai, a powerful magician; and Mokona, a curiously strange creature, to retrieve Sakura's dispersed memories!

Tsubasa Omnibus © CLAMP © CLAMP-ShigatsuTsuitachi CO.,LTD./Kodansha Ltd.

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Tsubasa: WoRLD CHRoNiCLE © CLAMP-ShigatsuTsuitachi CO.,LTD./Kodansha Ltd.

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